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MÖRĀN 'ETHŌ

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WOLFGANG HAGE

SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN THE EAST



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SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN THE EAST

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IN THE EAST**

By
WOLFGANG HAGE

Lectures given at the
St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, Kottayam
in March 1986

SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN THE EAST

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PREFACE

When St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute was founded in September 1985. I was privileged to be admitted to the body of Consultants from abroad. So I felt it an honour as well as an opportunity to fulfil an obligation when I was invited by the Chairman of SEERI Advisory Committee. The Most Reverend Isaac Mar Youhanon D. D., to give a lecture series on some topics of Syrian Church History.

When I delivered these lectures, in March 1986, I was well aware of the risk involved in a westerner like me talking on Eastern Christian topics to people living this tradition themselves. Therefore, I had to understand my responsibility not as one advising the Syrian Christian people on their own heritage, but as one interpreting some items of Syrian Church History to a critical audience.

The lecture series pertains to a field of research, to which I have devoted myself for many years: History of East Syrian Christianity, especially its missionary enterprise in Central Asia. It starts (lecture no. I) with some remarks on the establishment of the Church of the East under the pagan Persian rule in the 5th century, pointing out the special character of the missionary activities undertaken by this part of Syrian Christianity. Then the lectures (nos. II - V) deal with the mediaeval Central Asian missionary fields, teaching on some aspects of Christian life in a predominantly non-Christian environment, focussing attention on mutual influences. And finally (lecture no. VI), we follow an important representative of Far Eastern Christianity on his way from Peking to Mesopotamia, and come full circle, returning to the Middle East in the 13th century. The course of lectures is rounded off with a last lecture (no. VII) on one of the most important scholars in Syrian Church History, a representative of West Syrian Orthodox Christianity in the same 13th century, whose historical writings are a treasury of knowledge regarding East Syrian Christianity in the Far East, too.

The lectures given here have been published severally on different occasions in German earlier (cf. footnotes 1, 24, 49, 85, 115, 143, and 176). It is for the first time, however, that these have been translated from a quite "exotic" language, and published in book form, making it accessible to a broader English speaking readership. I recall with gratitude the audience at my lectures at Kottayam, all the patient and friendly clerics and laity who had come from different parts of Kerala.

I owe a debt of gratitude to The Most Reverend Isaac Mar Youhanon D. D., late Bishop of the Eparchy of Tiruvalla of the Malankara Catholic Church, who had invited me and offered me his generous hospitality. I am grateful to The Very Reverend Monsignor George Chundevalel, Vicar-General of the Eparchy, for his helpful care during my stay in Kerala. I am also indebted to The Most Reverend Dr. Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of the Church of the East, for his friendly hospitality given to me during my short stay in his Palace at Trichur. Grateful thanks are due to the Director of St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute. The Reverend Dr. Jacob Thekeparampil, my tireless host at Kottayam, who looked after me with warmth, making me feel at home, and who made it possible for me to become acquainted with the Christians of St. Thomas in Kerala.

Rev. Dr. C. A. Abraham went through my English manuscript and made the necessary linguistic corrections. I thank him very sincerely for this kind service. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Hans-Gernot Jung, Bishop of the Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck in Germany, and to Oberlandeskirchenrat Dietrich Gang, Member of Church Government, for their generosity, which enabled me to cover the geographical distance between Western Christianity and the famous Christians of St. Thomas in Kerala who, despite all the pluralism in Church organization today, are sharers of the ancient and venerable Syriac patrimony.

Marburg University, Germany
at the First Anniversary of SEERI

Dr. Wolfgang Hage

I

The Roman Church of Constantine the Great and Christianity in the Persian Empire¹

When Christianity began to spread from Palestine in the 1st century A.D., two great political powers stood against each other in the Near and the Middle East: the Roman (later Byzantine) Empire and the Empire of the Parthians (or Sassanid Persians since the early 3rd century), the traditional enmity of which had a determining influence on the history of that area for centuries. The borderline between these rival empires roughly corresponding (changing somewhat from time to time) to the eastern border of modern Syria and crossing the eastern part of modern Turkey, divided the landscape of Mesopotamia with its Syriac speaking population. This situation lasted until the Islamic conquest in the first half of the 7th century, resulting in the unification of the Near and the Middle East into a new great empire under Arab rule².

The Roman-Persian border, although setting apart the two worlds politically and culturally, did not hinder Christianity in any way because the Christian mission, starting from

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1. Slightly abridged version of the author's article, "Die ostroemische Staatskirche und die Christenheit des Perserreiches", in: *Zeitschrift fuer Kirchengeschte*, vol. 84 (Stuttgart, 1973), pp. 174-187.
 2. E. Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071 nach griechischen, arabischen, syrischen, und armenischen Quellen* (*Corpus Bruxellense Historiae, Byzantinae* vol. 3, 3), Bruxelles 1935, pp. 3-37.

Palestine and spreading across Egypt, Western Syria, Anatolia and Europe, had crossed the Euphrates eastwards as well. The city of Edessa (modern Urfa in Southern Turkey), situated just beyond that river, accepted Christianity, at the latest, in the course of the 2nd century and developed by the end of the 3rd century into the city with the highest Christian percentage in its population³. If we concede some historical basis to the famous "Chronicle of Arbela", the reliability of which is questioned today⁴, Christians must have existed in the area east of the Tigris already in the first half of the 2nd century. A hundred years later, at the beginning of the 3rd century, we find several bishoprics east of the modern city of Baghdad near the lower course of the joint streams Euphrates and Tigris as well as in the landscapes north of the Persian Gulf deep inside the realm of the Persian Empire of those days⁵. And an additional remark in the "Book of the Laws of the Countries", published by one of the pupils of the Edessenian theologian Bardesanes, at the beginning of the 3rd century, permits us to suppose the existence of Christians among the Kushan people in that early period near the Upper Oxus (Amu Darya) in the northern part of modern Afghanistan⁶.

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3. Regarding spread of Christianity in the East, cf. the titles given in footnote 2 chapt 2. For early spread, in addition cf. A. v. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, vol. II, 4th ed., Leipzig 1924, pp. 678-697; W. A. Wigram *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church or the Church of the Sassanid Persian Empire, 100-640 A. D.*, London 1910, pp. 24-39. J. B. Segal, *Edessa "the Blessed City"*, Oxford 1970, pp. 62-109.
 4. *Die Chronik von Arbela*, ed. and transl. by P. Kawerau, vols. I-II (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 467-468 = *Scriptores Syri*, vols. 199-200), Louvain 1985. - Against authenticity: J. M. Fiey, *Auteur et date de la Chronique d'Arbeles*, in: *L'Orient syrien*-vol. 12 (Vernon, 1967), pp. 255-302; idem, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 310 = *Subsidia*, vol. 36), Louvain 1970, pp. 10-47. - Confirming authenticity: Kawerau, *op. cit.* II, pp. 1-12.
 5. *Ibid.* I, pp. 2 ff. 31; II, pp. 19 ff. 51. - J. Neusner, *The Conversion of Adiabene to Christianity*, in: *Numen*, vol. 13 (Leiden, 1966), pp. 144-150.
 6. *The Book of the Laws of the Countries, Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, ed. and transl. by H. J. W. Drijvers (*Semitic Texts with Translations*, vol. 3), Assen 1965, pp. 60 f.

Christianity, thus spreading over the Persian Empire, was mainly supported by the native Syrian and Iranian population, but to a lesser degree also by those West Syrians and Greeks who had been deported as captives by the Persians from the temporarily occupied Roman border provinces into the East⁷.

This Christianity under Persian rule differed from that under the Roman Empire in many ways. I shall only recall a man like Aphraates, the famous "Persian Sage", whose theological writings in the early 4th century hardly contain influences of Greek philosophy. The Western dispute about the theology of Arius did not leave any trace in his writings and he was engaged in the argument with the theology of the Jews in Mesopotamia in a manner unknown to the Church Fathers in the West⁸. But the conditions of Christian life under the Roman and Persian dispensations were comparable in at least one aspect: In the realm of the Romans as well as of the Persians Christianity had to exist as a religious minority amidst a non-Christian population, subjected to non-Christian rulers. Church History is aware of martyrs in both empires. But even on this point we must consider that there were characteristic differences in details.

Until the first half of the 4th century Christians in the Persian Empire were not subject to persecutions officially ordered by the King of Kings and executed all over the country. The persecutions in the Persian Empire in those days were rather of a local character. The ruler of the state was not behind the martyrdom of individual Christians in this or that place. They were victims of occasional actions of the representatives of Persian Zoroastrianism. This was the powerful religion of the Iranians, which flourished after its renaissance in the 3rd century under the first Sassanid rulers and consequently deprived the Christian faith of its chance to

7. Fiey, *Jalons*, pp. 55-64.

8. J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism. the Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth Century Iran* (*Studia post-biblica*, vol. 19), Leiden 1971.

convert the ruler and gain the status of the established religion in Persia⁹.

In the Roman Empire the situation was quite different. Since the time of Emperor Decius in the fifties of the 3rd century the ruler himself had tried to wipe out the Christians from all over his empire through cruel persecutions, and the number of martyrs in the Roman Empire in those days far surpassed the number of victims in the realm of the Persians. It was not surprising therefore, that at the time of those persecutions in the Roman Empire Christians from the West had sought refuge in the territory of the King of Kings¹⁰. In its opposition to Christianity, however, the pagan Roman authority could not rely on any particular religion, which was strong enough to check Christianity in the long turn. The Christians in the realm of the Romans existed in a religious environment, which, despite all syncretic approaches, was generally multiform and in the end powerless, so that their own Christian faith finally could gain the victory. It was the significant conversion of Constantine the Great, which marked this turning point in Church History of the Roman Empire.¹¹

When at the beginning of the 4th century, Constantine began to favour the Christians in his empire he did more than alter the outer conditions of a so far persecuted people. The then favoured Christianity in the Roman Empire, well on the way to be the established religion of the political authority, was subjected to far-reaching changes in its character. This is the well-known double aspect of that significant turning-point in the 4th century: the victory of Christianity over paganism, along with the close connection between Church and political authority. In order to understand better the further history of Christianity in Persia, we must

9. A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen 1936, pp. 136-173; Fiey, *Jalons*, pp. 50.53-55.87.

10. Wigram, *Introduction*, pp. 34 f.; J. Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise, the Story of a Church on Fire*, Edinburgh/Madras 1928 (Reprint Trichur 1961) pp. 7 f.

11. For further details, cf. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church (The Pelican History of the Church, vol. 1)*, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 125-129.

briefly recall the character of that close connection between Church and State under Constantine and his successors in the Roman / Byzantine Empire.

Consequent on his conversion Constantine became a member of the Church not as a mere Christian among his fellow Christians. The Emperor joined the Church with his imperial dignity and with all the authority of the ruler of the Roman state. The remarkable fact that the hitherto pagan sovereign of the Empire himself professed the Christian faith, is only one side of the story of the turning-point in Roman Church History. The other side is that the state in its own interest had incorporated the Church: The Emperor as the ruler of this state became the ruler of its Church as well. This quite new situation found its innermost expression in the fact that the Empire and the ruler in his imperial dignity became from now on an integral topic in the Christian theology. It was the new conception of a "political theology", which characterized for all the future the essence of the established Church in the Roman / Byzantine Empire.

Eusebius, Constantine's contemporary and great admirer, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, was the theological authority who gave the Empire and its Emperor a suitable place in the divine "oikonomia" in the context of promise and fulfilment, by holding up Constantine as chosen by God to be the instrument of his providence.¹² Eusebius saw in the Christian Emperor's realm the fulfilment of the promises of the coming time of salvation. The idea behind this conviction was that the Lord Christ in his death and resurrection had already gained the victory over the lords of the world. But this victory of Christ was a hidden one on earth, as long as paganism dominated in the state, as long as the Christians, the believers of their victorious Lord, were persecuted by the rulers of the

12. For the following, cf. D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Caesarea*, London 1960, pp. 168-189; F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy, Origins and Background*, vol. II, Washington 1966, *passim*; and in more detail R. Farina, *L'impero e l'imperatore cristiano in Eusebio di Cesarea, la prima teologia politica del Cristianesimo* (Bibliotheca Theologica Salesiana, vol. 1, 2), Zuerich 1966.

pagan world. But now this contradiction was dissolved. In the powerful Roman Empire, which had now turned Christian, the victory of Christ was realized; what was a mystery till then was now visible to everyone. Eusebius perceived the Christian Empire in the line of the Biblical tradition starting with Abraham and the divine promise made to him. He could follow here the Apostle's interpretation concerning the correspondence of promise and fulfilment: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness... and the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed".¹³ This divine promise was fulfilled in the Christian Empire, which included all the nations, leading them to the common devotion founded in faith.

The transformation of Christianity within the Roman Empire into the established Church, linked with the eschatological interpretation, was not without consequences for the Christians beyond the Roman borders. If the Christian Empire with its Christian Emperor and its political power was of such eschatological importance, what about those Christians who lived in the midst of paganism outside this divine realm? If the Christian Roman Emperor was the "Image of Christ" and the supreme representative of the Christian Church, what was his relation to those Christians who remained subjected to other rulers, subjected to the pagan Persian King of Kings?

A necessary consequence of the "political theology" in the Christian Roman Empire was that – although unintentional and not immediately discernible – a schism was brought about in Christianity. It was not a break in the sense of cutting off the ties of a common ecclesiastical organization across the Roman-Persian border, because such organization had hardly existed.¹⁴ And even within the Roman Empire the Church was still on its way to the formation of such a hierarchic organization; this was perfected not before the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. But then, in the 4th century,

13. Galatians 3:6-8.

14. Fiey, *Jalons*, pp. 66-83 *passim*.

there was a break in so far as the Christian minority in the realm of the Persian King of Kings, who was an enemy of the Roman Emperor, was compelled to avoid all contacts with the Church in the West. Such contacts could provoke the distrust of the King of Kings. The high theological esteem of the Christian Emperor and his Christian Empire implied inevitably the consequence that the Roman Emperor himself, the supreme representative of the Christian Church, was responsible for all the Christians in the world and was the protector of even those living outside his Christian Empire, a claim, which Constantine had already explicitly asserted in the face of the Persian King of Kings.¹⁵ And this, however, meant that the Christians in Persia without their own contribution, but according to those western theological ideas, found themselves in the situation of a political vanguard of the Roman Empire within the realm of the Persians. And this became significant for the further history of the Christians in the East because the Persian state perceived those consequences and the Christians in Persia were obliged to take this dangerous new situation into consideration.

After the establishment of the Church in the Roman Empire, the Persian King of Kings reacted, in the first half of the 4th century, by a persecution of his Christian subjects. This was for the first time in the history of the Church of Persia that an official general persecution was undertaken by the state. Further official persecutions of shorter duration took place also in the first half of the 5th century.¹⁶

During this time Persian Christianity which had existed until then on the whole without a complete hierarchical organization, constituted for itself a Church of its own. About 80 bishoprics were united into six ecclesiastical provinces directed by Metropolitan Bishops, and the Metropolitan in the double city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the King's capital, was appo-

15. H. Doerries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Goettingen, philologisch-historische Klasse, ser. 3, vol. 34), Goettingen 1954, pp. 125-127.

16. Wigram, *Introduction*, pp. 59-76. 138-141; Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 17-36; Fiey, *Jalons*, pp. 87-92.

inted the common head of the Church with the title of a "Catholicos". This organization of the "Church of the East" was the result of a synod held in the year 410 in the capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon itself. At the same time the fundamental rules and procedures of the Church life were established in detail: the inauguration of the clergy in the upper ranks and the description of their jurisdiction, the structure of the clergy in the lower ranks, and the ordination of priests.¹⁷ With this development in the Persian Empire at the beginning of the 5th century a complete and unified Church had come into being with its own hierarchy and its own Church law, outside the Church of the Roman Empire. This fundamental independence, however, did not exclude the possibility of the Persian bishops, in case of quarrel with their own Catholicos, seeking the help of the Patriarch of Antioch, beyond the borders in the West, who was acknowledged as a neutral authority. But even this possibility was taken away by a second synod of the East Syrian Church in 424, which did not concede the right to address an authority outside their own Church. By this resolution the Church of the East had become independent (autocephalous) to the utmost extent, and only a short time later the Catholicos changed his title into the double title of a "Catholicos-Patriarch", which must be regarded as an expression of self-confidence.¹⁸

In the first synod of 410 mentioned above the new organized Church of the East accepted the Trinitarian Creed of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), the first two Ecumenical Councils in the Christian Emperor's Church. Thus the Church in the Persian Empire without any reservation accepted the results of the dogmatical disputes, which in the meantime had determined Church History in the Roman Empire. At the end of the 5th century the Eastern Church once again respon-

17. *Synodicon Orientale, ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, ed. and transl. by J. B. Chabot (*Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques*, vol. 37), Paris 1902, pp. 17-36 / 253-275; C. D. G. Mueller, *Stellung und Bedeutung des Katholikos-Patriarchen von Seleukeia-Ktesiphon im Altertum*, in: *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 53 (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 229-231.

18. *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 43-53 / 235-298; Mueller, *Stellung*, p. 233; Fiey, *Jalons*, pp. 17-83.

ded to the dogmatical development in the West. But then, at the synod held in 486, the East decided against the official theology of the Romans, supporting the christological position of Nestorius who had been excommunicated in the Emperor's Church at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431.¹⁹

Both these results in the Church History of the East during the 5th century (the establishment of the Church of the East and the reception of the christological position of Nestorius) can, of course, be interpreted as the final consequences of the development within Eastern Christianity itself. The unification of the hitherto single bishoprics and parishes into a common Church organization within the Persian Empire happened as consistently as within the Roman realm, where even at that time the hierarchic order of the patriarchates had come into existence. So we can understand the establishment of the Church of the East in the early 5th century as the result of a development comparable to that in the Church of the Roman Empire at that time.

Even the official acceptance of Nestorius's christology by the Church of the East in the late 5th century was not carried out without any preparation. Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople had represented a theological position, which had been derived from the christological tradition of the famous School of Antioch, and among all the important theological centres within the Roman Empire this was closest to the Christians in Persia. So not accidentally representatives of that Antiochean christology existed even in the Roman-Persian border-area, and when persecuted by the orthodox authorities they could easily passover the border and spread their ideas under Persian rule outside the orthodox Emperor's realm. Mention may be made here of the important "School of the Persians" at Edessa, that famous city in the outskirts of the Roman Empire, where a person like Ibas could teach his ideas and support the Antiochean christology emphatically even after the excommunication of Nestorius.²⁰

19. *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 53-60 / 299-307,

20. A. Voobebus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 266=Subsidia, vol. 26), Louvain 1965, pp. 7-32.

But there is the other point of view as well: we might also interpret the development of Persian Church History in the 5th century as a response to the challenging events in the Roman Empire in the 4th century and the rise of the established Roman Church with the idea of a "political theology". The Persian Christians had to take into consideration the hostile (but politically understandable) reaction of their own ruler, and they could escape the general persecution only by stressing the superiority of their own interests. The only possible course for them was to dissociate themselves from the established Church in the West. The Christians in Persia felt obliged to prove to their King that the Christian religion was not at all identical with the Church of the Roman enemy. And I am convinced that this compulsion promoted the development of an organized Church of its own, which finally declared itself independent of the Church in the Roman West.

The above interpretation notwithstanding, the Church of the East was not set from the beginning in a polemical attitude against the Church in the West. We must not forget that some bishops from the neighbouring Roman territory also had participated in the above mentioned synod at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 to help to introduce some elements of the western canonical law into the Persian Church. Nor must we forget that because of those good contacts between the Christians on both sides of the border, even in the 5th century, the King of Kings could make use of his Christians as political messengers to the Romans.²¹ The fact remains, however, that the Christians under Persian rule had established a hierarchic independent Church of their own. It was evident that in doing this the Christians of the East had followed the right path to get back their legitimation as a tolerated minority. That the King favoured the establishment of an independent Church in his realm, can be seen as a mark of his goodwill towards the religious minority, which had shown that it was not under the control of the Church of the enemy. When, at the end of the 5th century, the Church of the East took a second step distancing itself from Roman Christianity by the official

21. Mueller, *Stellung*, pp. 230-232.

acceptance of Nestorian christology, thus separating itself in its dogmatical position as well, this was favoured by the Persian authorities, too. The great interest of the King of Kings in this decision of his Christian minority can be clearly seen in the fate of the contemporary Catholicos-Patriarch Babowai: He was actually opposed to the Nestorian christology in his Church, and was murdered by the King of Kings after being accused as a friend and supporter of the Romans.²²

So in the history of Eastern Christianity we can clearly discern the relation between challenge and response as an important factor: What happened in the Christian East was a response to the challenge of the established Church in the West with its dangerous "political theology". And even the final acceptance of Nestorian christology and thereby the dogmatical position against the orthodoxy of the Emperor's Church can be seen as no more than a necessary response in the vital interests of survival in a pagan-ruled world.

So we must not facilely maintain that the Church of the East was excluded from "Orthodox Christianity" because of "Nestorian heterodoxy"; history gives us a different picture of the events. The orthodox Roman Church itself had invited the schism by its "political theology" and by its theological ideas about Church and Emperor. Unintentionally, indeed, but in reality the Roman Church excluded the Christians in Persia who subsequently accepted Nestorius's christology.

The above mentioned events in Church History of the 4th and 5th centuries on the west and east of the Roman-Persian border definitively divided the Christian body into two parts with their own characteristics. The greater part of the Christian body entered the so-called "Constantinean Era". The smaller part, represented by the Church of the East, remained under non-Christian rulers and has continued to exist outside the "Constantinean Era" until the present day.

22. Babowai, indeed, had tried to take up contacts with the Emperor in the West; cf. Wigram, Introduction, pp. 151-155; A. S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity, London 1968, p. 252.

The Christians in the East were aware of this characteristic difference from the West, and they could use it as an argument for the orthodoxy of their own Eastern Church. So, for example, the Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I, about the year 800; emphasized in a letter to a monastery in Western Syria: "In our country the word of orthodoxy remained correct and unchanged, and never was there a dissent between orthodoxy and our creed. We did not add to or take away from the pearl of truth, which the holy Apostles handed down in this part of the East. But in your country you had Christian rulers. And whoever gained the favour of these rulers, the heretics or the orthodox, to this position they compelled the priests and the people. Therefore sometimes additions to or omissions from the creed with you were made. What Constantine the Great had confirmed was rejected by Constantius, and what Constantius had confirmed was rejected by his successor".²³

So from the 4th and 5th centuries onwards we must distinguish these streams in Church History: the history of the Church in the Christian state and the history of the Church under non-Christian rulers. This was an important difference affecting nearly all areas of Church life, in particular the history of Christian mission in both parts of Christianity. Christian mission of the Roman/Byzantine Church at that time used to be a political matter, since the authority behind the missionary enterprise was not the Patriarch, but the Emperor himself. Christianization (mission) and making satellites (submission) were one and the same thing. Let us only recall the mission among the Visigoths on the Danubian border in the 4th century, the missionary enterprise among the Turkish tribes in the North and North-East of the Black Sea in the 6th century, and the Christianization of the peoples in Nubia, those dangerous neighbours of the Empire at the southern

23. R. J. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche Timothee I, etude critique avec un appendice: La lettre de Timothee I aux moines du Couvent de Mar Maron (traduction latine et texte chaldeen)* Studi e testi, vol. 187), Citta del Vaticano 1956, pp. 120 f., and Syriac appendix, p. 41.

border of Egypt. And soon afterwards other established Churches arose even outside the Roman / Byzantine Empire according to its pattern: such as in the Empire of Axum (later Ethiopia) and among the Eastern Slavs in Russia. Even the Christianization of Western and Middle Europe, carried out by the Latin Church, was accompanied by political interests and performed by the power of the political authorities, in this case above all by the authority of the Frankish Kings.

In contrast to that the missionary enterprises of the Church of the East were carried out by the Church itself; and sometimes only indirectly the Eastern Church was able to make profit out of the military success of its political authorities. This happened in the Arabian Peninsula, where Christianity could spread during the Persian occupation at the end of the 6th century, and in Transoxiana (the area beyond the Oxus) about two centuries later, when the Muslim Arabs conquered this area and broke the power of the Persian Zoroastrianism in favour of the Christian mission too. But the East Syrian missionary enterprise did not know any official support by the state, did not know any christianisation by force. The Church of the East actually stood alone without any powerful help of any political authority against all the other world religions of Asia. Nevertheless the mission of this Church not only reached Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula and the Island of Socotra east of Africa, but Christian communities of this Church were found on the Malabar coast of India, in Central Asia and in China as well. The Church of the East grew to be the most widespread Church in the Middle Ages, and this leads us to the topic of the following lectures.

II

Missionary Enterprise of the Church of the East in Central and East Asia¹

Church History grants the honorary title of the most successful "missionary Church" in the Middle Ages to the Syrian Church of the East with its first centre in the Sassanid Persian capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In the second half of the 8th century the Catholicos-Patriarch moved to Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphs, the new Muslim rulers in the Near and Middle East, and Baghdad became the ecclesiastical centre of a missionary enterprise unparalleled in the mediaeval history of Christianity all over the world.

The main area of East Syrian missionary activities was the Asian continent between the river Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Aral Sea in the West, the coast of China in the East, the Himalaya Mountains in the South and Southern Siberia with Lake Balkhash and Lake Baykal in the North. This largely extended field of Innermost Asia and China with its mountains, steppes, deserts, fertile valleys and oases corresponds essentially to the territory of present-day China (including Tibet and Sinkiang), Outer Mongolia (the Mongol Peoples Republic) and the Southern Siberian republics (particularly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) of the Soviet Union.

1. Abstract from the author's contribution "Der Weg nach Asien, die ostsyrische Missionskirche", in: *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte*, vol. II: Die Kirche des frühen Mittelalters, part 1, ed. by K. Schaeferdiek, Muenchen 1978, pp. 360-393.

Syriac Christianity had begun to penetrate these landscapes of Central and Eastern Asia since the early centuries². In the early 3rd century – as we have already seen³ – there were some Christians among the Kushan people at the Upper Oxus, and three centuries later Christianity was present among the Hephthalites, a people of Central Asian origin, on the banks of the same river.

Christianity in those early days occasionally was spread by refugees from the Persian Empire and more systematically by the bishops of the easternmost dioceses of the East Syrian Church. In particular the bishopric (and later on metropolitan see) of Marv, the cultural centre south of the Oxus, became the starting-point of the East Syrian missions in these early pre-Islamic times. From here Christianity crossed the Oxus and entered Transoxiana, reached the urban centres of Bukhara and Samarqand, and found its way into the native Soghdian (Iranian) population, as well as into the Turkish peoples who had invaded this country from the North. When in the 8th century the Muslim armies, after conquering the Middle East, had penetrated Transoxiana, they found Christian communities here and even further in the North beyond the Yaxartes (Syr Darya).

2. Regarding history of East Syrian mission in Central and Eastern Asia in detail, cf. F. Nau, *L'expansion nestorienne en Asie*, in: *Annales du Musée Guimet*, vol. 40 (Paris, 1914), pp. 193–388; A. Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East*, in: *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester*, vol. 9 (London, 1925), pp. 297–371; Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise* (cf. footnote 10), *passim*; P. Pelliot, *Christianity in Central Asia in the Middle Ages*, in: *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 17 (London, 1930), pp. 301–312; L. E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia from the Time of Muhammed till the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge 1933; K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vols. I–II, New York / London 1933–1938, *passim*; G. Messina, *Il Cristianesimo tra Turchi, Cinesi e Mongoli*, in: *La Civiltà cattolica*, vol. 96 (Roma, 1945), pp. 90–102, 290–301; J. Dauvillier, *Les provinces chaldeennes “de l'exterieur” au moyen age*, in: *Malanges offerts au F. Cavallera*, Toulouse 1948, pp. 260–316; Mar Aprem, *Nestorian Missions* (Golden Jubilee Publications, vol. 2), Trichur 1976,

3. Cited in footnote 6 above.

This was the time of Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I (780-823), an energetic promoter of all missionary activities in his Church. In his days for the first time in the history of Syrian mission we hear about monks and bishops who were especially equipped for their missionary work and sent out to their fields anywhere in "the furthest extremes of the East".⁴ Obviously those missionaries followed the well-known ancient "silkroad" taken by the Syrian and Iranian merchants who crossed Central Asia by using this trade route and reached China. On the south-western section of this "silk road" were situated the cities of Marv, Bukhara and Samarkand mentioned above. We may suppose that along this road to the Far East the colonies of those Christian merchants grew into the first missionary bases among the native peoples of Inner Asia. In this way the East Syrian mission in those days crossed the basin of the river Tarim east of the Pamir on a northern route of the "silkroad", and reached the oasis of Turfan in the land of the Turkish Uighur.⁵ Taking a southern route through the basin of Tarim, the Syrian missionaries had arrived at the country of the Tibetans, and some of them accepted Christianity: In the 8th and 9th centuries we hear about Christians near the upper course of the river Indus in the present Indian-Chinese border area.

But in the meantime an important centre of East Syrian Christianity had been established in a remote place far in the East. As inscribed on the famous Chinese monument of Shianfu, the capital of the then ruling Tang dynasty, the first Syrian monk had reached this city in the year 635.⁶ Here

4. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 84 f.

5. Christianity in this area will be the subject of our lecture no. IV.

6. Regarding history of Syrian Christianity in China and the monument of Shianfu, especially cf. J. Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-an Fu in Shen-hsi, China*, London 1888 (Reprint New York 1966); Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 169-191; A. C. Moule, *Christians in China Before the Year 1550*, London 1930; J. Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, London 1939; Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 2nd ed., Tokyo 1951; K. Enoki, *The Nestorian Christianity in China in Mediaeval Time According to Recent Historical and Archaeological Researches*, in: *Atti del convegno internazionale sul tema: L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, anno 361, quaderno nr. 62, *Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura*), Roma 1964, pp. 45-81.

the Christian religion met with the favour of the Emperor himself, and the Christian communities in China flourished, when more and more Christian people from the Middle East reached China. Christianity in China in those days was essentially a monastic one, represented by a lot of monasteries spread over large parts of the country, but these were Syrian or Iranian in origin, nearly without believers from the native Chinese population. This missionary field in the Far East reached out westwards to the city of Tunhwang, where the "silkroad" on the way to the West entered the basin of the river Tarim. Thus from the 7th century on, the peoples of Central Asia (Uighur, Tibetans and others) stood under the influence of East Syrian Christianity from the West as well as from the East.

But the situation changed in the middle of the 9th century, when the Chinese Emperor of that time opposed the foreign religions. And Christianity in China, after a history of more than two hundred years, disappeared with the expulsion of all the western monks out of the Empire. At about the same time, further in the West, Christianity among the Tibetans declined on account of strong Buddhist reaction. These turning points marked the end of the first period in the history of Central Asian and Far Eastern Christianity.

A second and even more successful period could certainly be linked to some survivals of that former Christianity in Central Asia. But the new missionary success of the East Syrians was based mainly on the native Turco-Mongol people and on the political power of this population under Mongol leadership. Syrian merchants and possibly also hermits who made use of the Inner Asian routes, even after the decline of the Christian mission in China and Tibet, proved important messengers of the Christian faith in the early part of the 11th century.⁷ In the area south of Lake Baykal (near the present Soviet-Mongol border) they succeeded in converting the prince of the Turco-Mongol tribe of the Kereit, and most of this people (if not the entire tribe) followed their ruler. This

7. For the following, cf. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 145-147.

missionary success gave a new and great impetus to Christianity in Central and East Asia. And at the beginning of the 13th century the Mongol, Chingiz-Khan, established his power just in that area south of Lake Baykal, which was then, two hundred years after the conversion of the Kereit, a stronghold of Christianity. For in the meantime Christianity had spread not only in the tribe of the Kereit, but also among the Naiman, whose prince had become Christian, and possibly among the tribes of the Merkit and Oirat as well. These Turco-Mongol tribes were those who first were united by Chingiz-Khan to the nucleus of the growing Mongol Empire. Therefore since the very beginning there were important authorities at the centre of the Mongol power who were members of those christianized tribes, followers of the faith of the Syrian Church of the East.⁸ At the same time, from the days of Chingiz-Khan onwards, we can find some Christian princesses of the above mentioned tribes, especially of the Kereit who were married to the Great Khans themselves.⁹ The best known of Chingiz-Khan's successors, the Great Khan Qubilai in the second half of the 13th century, moved the residence from Qara-Qorum south of Lake Baykal to Khanbaliq (Peking). And the Mongol conquest of China again opened the door to Christianity after the end of the above mentioned first period of its history under the Chinese Tang dynasty. But now Christianity was no longer the religion of foreign believers from the Middle East, its representatives in China were people of the Central Asian Turco-Mongol population, the ruling class of the Empire.

The conquests of the Mongols in the West strengthened Central Asian Christianity as well, although under the military campaigns some of the Christian communities in Transoxiana and in the area south of the Oxus disappeared, when their

8. H. H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th Century*, vol. I, London 1876, pp. 134. 161. 164. 187. 210. 723. 741; III (1888), pp. 90. 150. 168 f.; Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 102f.

9. Howorth, *History I*, pp. 23. 160f. 170f. 542. 559. 682. 717. 725f. III, pp. 78. 90; Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 160-162. - For the most famous of those Christian princesses, Sorghoqtani, cf. our lecture no. VI (with footnotes 3-6 chap. VI).

cities were destroyed.¹⁰ But generally the Christian Church prospered under Mongol power, which commanded large territories from Mesopotamia in the West to China in the East and was interested in commercial intercourse. Under the protection of this mighty Empire the security of the "silk road" was guaranteed and of the connecting lines between the Christian communities in the Far East and their patriarchal see at Baghdad in the Far West. Along the "silk road" on the way from Samarqand to Khanbaliq (Peking) new centres of the East Syrian Church grew and Christian mission flourished again. Thus a long chain of metropolitan sees and bishoprics stretched from the Oxus to Yellow Sea over a continent, which was controlled by rulers who were rather benevolent to the Christian religion.¹¹ For the Church of the East, with its widespread and promising missionary efforts the 13th and 14th centuries were the heyday of its history. Some reports of the close connection between Syriac Christianity and Turco-Mongol authorities had already reached the Occident in legendary disguise. There was in the territories of the Crusaders on the shore of the Mediterranean the legend about the so-called "Prester John", the passionately expected Christian king, coming from the Far East with a huge army to fight against Islam in the Near East.¹² This legend reflected the desires of the hard-pressed Crusaders, and at that time those expectations did not seem unrealistic.

The course of history, however, took a totally different turn. During the second half of the 14th century all the missionary success of the East Syrian Church in Central Asia and China came to an end and Christianity there disappeared completely after a few decades.

10. For the destructive nature of the Mongol conquest, cf. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. V, ed. by J. A. Boyle, Cambridge 1968, pp. 484-488.

11. Regarding these ecclesiastical centres in detail, cf. Dauvillier, *Provinces*, passim.

12. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 147-150; C. E. Nowell, *The Historical Prester John*, in: *Speculum*, a Journal of Mediaeval Studies, vol. 28 (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 435-445.

The external reasons for such a sudden decline and destruction can easily be found.¹³ In the year 1368 the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China was expelled by the Chinese Ming, and after the dominion of foreign rulers, which had lasted for more than a hundred years, a xenophobic reaction followed against anybody non-Chinese. The Turco-Mongol people of Central Asia who had come in during the Mongol time, had now to leave China. And together with these people who had represented Christianity in China, the Christian faith was expelled as well. This was the second decline of Christianity in China after the first one under the Tang dynasty, but this time Christianity disappeared from China so completely and without any remembrance that the Jesuits who reached China more than two hundred years later, came to be looked upon as the very first Christians in China.

At the same time Central Asia was also completely lost to Christianity. Buddhism, particularly in the form of Lamaism, had succeeded by then in finally winning the Turco-Mongol people in the eastern parts of Central Asia. The Mongols in its western parts and in Eastern Europe embraced Islam during the course of the 15th century, as the Mongols of Persia had already done in the latter part of the 13th century.

After this conversion of the Persian Mongols, the second victory of Islam in the Middle East after the conquest of the Muslim Arabs in the 7th century, the Church of the East in Mesopotamia was more and more oppressed in its homeland itself, and the Central Asian metropolitan sees and bishoprics became isolated from this centre of the Church. This isolation increased further when political troubles after the decline of the unified Mongol power, interrupted the intercourse along the "silk road", the link between East and West.

In addition to that a murderous plague had broken out in Innermost Asia in the last thirties of the 14th century, which

13. For the following, cf. Latourette, *Expansion II*, p. 339; Dauvillier, *Provinces*, p. 316. — Regarding situation in the Il-Khanid state of Persia, especially cf. our lecture no. VI.

spread in all directions and reached also Europe in the middle of the same century. This plague had already diminished Christianity in Central Asia, as can be seen from the numerous Christian tombstones from that time found in Southern Siberia.¹⁴ History records the devastating campaigns of the fanatic Muslim and enemy of the Christians, Timur-Leng, around 1400 A. D. and about the activities of his grandson Ulugh Beg who destroyed Christianity in Central Asia east of the Oxus completely. The Church of the East, with its chain of metropolitan sees, the largest Church in the Middle Ages, an "Oikumene" for itself which embraced many peoples, was almost suppressed overnight into the small Church of the "Assyrians", hidden in the remote mountains of Northern Mesopotamia.

Thus Central and East Asian mission of the Church of the East forms a finished and completed chapter of Church History, making it easier for us to analyze the effective factors that led to the rise and decline, of the East Syrian Churches, its missionary success and its failures. Apart from the external reasons for the decline mentioned above we can discern internal reasons, too. One problem faced by the Mother Church in Mesopotamia arose from the expanse of its missionary field, for the distance from the patriarchal see at the Tigris to the Oxus, the river forming the border of Central Asia, was about three thousand kilometers, and from there to Khanbaliq (Peking) about another six thousand kilometers. To cover those distances right across the continent over mountains and through vast steppes needed several months. The Christian Chinese inscription of Shianfu, mentioned earlier, for example, mentions a Catholicos-Patriarch as head of the Church in Baghdad who had passed away a long time before.¹⁵ The geographical barrier seemed greater, as the Christian minority did not form a connected unity, but consisted of a lot of small and tiny communities

14. D. Chwolson, *Syrisch-nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semirjetschie* (*Memories de l'Academie Imperiale des Sciences de St. -Petersbourg*, ser. 7, vol. 37, 8), St. -Petersbourg 1890, passim (noticeably increasing number of tombstones in 1337-39). - Regarding these stones in general, cf. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 200-216; Saeki, *Nestorian Documents*, pp. 408-415 (with figures).

15. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 183f.; Legge, *Nestorian Monument*, p. 29 (with footnote 5).

scattered all over the territories of the vast continent. And, moreover, the Christians in Central and East Asia had come from quite different peoples with different languages. The Church government had to respond to this situation.

Early synods of the Church of the East in the 5th and 6th centuries had made it obligatory for the metropolitans and bishops to take part in synods to be held at the see of the Catholicos-Patriarch every fourth year. The "Metropolitans of the Outer Sees" (in the remote countries), of course had been dispensed from this obligation, but in lieu of it they, had to report to the Catholicos-Patriarch by letter from their ecclesiastical provinces.¹⁶ To fill vacant bishoprics and generally to erect new ones according to their own responsibility, was part of the often confirmed authority of the metropolitans in the areas of their jurisdiction.¹⁷ The ordination of each bishop had to be sanctioned by the Catholicos-Patriarch himself. This regulation, however, was not binding to the "Metropolitans of the Outer Sees".¹⁸ Those privileges, granted on the basis of the geographical situation, led to a far-reaching independence of the metropolitans in Central and East Asia.

There was indeed a bond between the patriarchate in the West and even the remotest metropolitan sees whose believers were drawn from the various peoples and languages. This consisted in the consecration of the far eastern metropolitans as well as in the liturgical language in those remote ecclesiastical provinces.

Despite all the distances, which had necessitated the above mentioned dispensations from Church law, the East Syrian Church always persisted in the Principle that the metropolitans themselves (even the "Metropolitans of the Outer Sees") had to be consecrated by either the Catholicos-Patriarch himself or at least with his agreement in each case. So these privileged metro-

16. *Synodicon Orientale* (cf. footnote 17). pp. 64. 121 / 313. 380; Dauvillier, *Provinces*, pp. 271 f.

17. *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 105f. 122. 548 / 363. 381f. 558.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 23. 32. 93 f. 218 / 263. 271. 349 f. 483 f.; Dauvillier, *Provinces*, p. 272.

politans, consecrated in Mesopotamia for their remote dioceses, could guarantee the connection with the patriarchate, even if they never came back from the Far East. The consequence for the Church organization in Central and Eastern Asia was that the clergy in the upper ranks had mostly been drawn not from the indigenous Christian population, but from the Syrian or Iranian.¹⁹ This however, was not a principle rigidly applied and the Christians from Central Asia were not always excluded from the highest ranks of hierarchy, as we can see from the life of an Eastern Asian monk who rose to the Position of the Catholicos-Patriarch.²⁰ But generally the far eastern hierarchy in the upper ranks was of foreign ethnic origin, and while it guaranteed the connection with the Mother Church in the West it remained strange to the native people of Central Asia itself and to the native lower ranks of the Clergy.

Double-edged in a similar way was the other bond between the centre of the Church in Mesopotamia and the missionary field, namely the common liturgical language of the church.²¹ The multiform character of the population, which the East Syrian mission had addressed to, was reflected by a multiform ecclesiastical literature in those areas. For the Syrian Church of the East (like the other Oriental Churches) used to respect the vernaculars of the christianized peoples by translating parts of their Syriac literature, and the literary documents of the Christian in Central and East Asia (written in Soghdian, Uighur or Chinese) clearly reflect the international character of the East Syrian Church in the Middle Ages.²² But even in the Far East Syriac,

19. *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 93 f. 122 / 349 f. 381; Dauvillier, *Provinces*, p. 271.

20. This remarkable Catholicos-Patriarch in the transition from the 13th to the 14th century was Yahballaha III, cf. our lecture no. VI.

21. For the following, cf. W. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen und: syrische Kirchensprache in der nestorianischen Asienmission*, in *Erkenntnisse und Meinungen*, vol. II, ed. by G. Wiessner (*Goettinger Orientforschungen*, ser. 1, vol. 17), Wiesbaden 1978, pp. 131-160.

22. Regarding the extensive Christian Chinese literature, cf. Saeki, *Nestorian Documents*, pp. 113-314 C; Enoki, *Nestorian Christianity*, pp. 65-77. - Some items of the Soghdian and Uighur literatures our lecture no. IV is dealing with.

the language of the Church's theology and liturgy, prevailed over the native languages. This was a means to tie the remote missionary field with its manifold population to the Mother Church in the West. In spite of all concessions to the various vernaculars Syriac was adhered to as the liturgical language, at least for the most important parts of the divine service. The lectures of the biblical pericopes in the vernacular were understood by the native believers, but the textbooks containing the ritual according to the Church Calender and the hymns for the particular sundays, which have been found in Central Asia and China, were written, not accidentally, in Syriac.²³

In this insistence on a common and obligatory liturgical language the Church of the East decisively differed from the other Oriental Churches. Especially instructive is the comparison with the mission of the Byzantine Church at the same time among the Slavic peoples who from the beginning were not bound to celebrate the liturgy in the Greek language of their Mother Church; they celebrated in their own Slavonic vernacular. On the contrary, the Church of the East with its Syriac liturgical language among all the peoples of Central and East Asia reminds us of the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in West with the Latin predominance over all the vernaculars of Europe.

We may understand the interests of the East Syrian Church in doing so: to guarantee the coherence of even the farthest eastern parishes with the patriarchate. But this bond was at the same time a cause of alienation in the country itself. Just like Latin in some parts of the mediaeval west, the Syriac language in Innermost Asia remained a language strange to the people, as we can gather from the Christian Central Asian inscriptions written in faulty Syriac and from that Turkish monk from the East, who became the Catholicos-Patriarch in spite of his poor Syriac.²⁴

23. For this predominance of Syriac, cf. our lecture no. V.

24. For some examples regarding the inscriptions, cf. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen*, pp. 149-154. - For the Catholicos-Patriarch, cf. footnote 31 chapt. VI.

This was the geographical problem, the problem of the great distances, and the attempt to overcome it by that double bond between the Middle and the Far East: by installing mostly Mesopotamian people on the metropolitan sees and by keeping up the common language in the liturgy. The general religious situation in Central Asia was to become another problem for the Syrian Christians.²⁵

There were a lot of religions, striving for the allegiance of the various peoples and tribes of Inner Asia, and the East Syrian Christians were not the only representatives of Christianity in the region. In mediaeval Central Asia and China we hear about Christians of the other Oriental Churches as well (West Syrian Orthodox, Armenians, Russian Orthodox), and we also know of the Latin missionary enterprise of the Franciscan Friars in the Far East. Among these Christian groups the East Syrian Church was the most successful, the only one with considerable numbers of converts out of the native population itself. But in comparison with the non-Christian religions in the East this most successful Christian denomination was only a tiny minority, prevented from a striking victory among the peoples of Asia by the permanent rivalry with the indigenous religions of the Far East as well as with the foreign religions, which had entered Inner Asia. Everywhere over the continent, but especially in the centres of trade along the "silk road" and in the political centres of the Mongol Empire, Christians had to live in the immediate neighbourhood with Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Manichaeans, Muslims, and (in China and its Central Asian vicinity) with Confucianists and Taoists. All these religions or philosophies not only hindered an unlimited spread of Christianity among the native peoples, but also managed to smuggle some of their ideas into Central Asian Christianity itself. In this context the most native of all these religions and systems among Turco-Mongol people, namely Shamanism, played the leading part. This we shall deal with in the following lecture.

Surveying the history of Central and Eastern Asian Christianity, we must recognize that the missionary enterprise

25. Cf. the topic of our lecture no. III.

of the Church of the East failed just by its successes. As long as East Syrian Christianity existed in the Far East, it remained an integral part fully dependent on the Mother Church in Mesopotamia. We do not know, if this was a decision arrived at by the patriarchal see after careful consideration. Presumably the keeping of the remote communities in a close dependent relationship had developed quite unintentionally. We must concede that in the heyday of Central Asian Christianity this status of dependence permitted the most lasting success, since we can clearly recognize from our sources – as we shall see in our following lecture – that this Christianity did not yet possess the vital power to exist totally independently in an autocephalous manner. The dangerous influences of the religious environment in the Far East could only be resisted by a close connection and regular contacts with the Mother Church in Mesopotamia by means of those two bonds we have spoken about: the common Syriac language in the liturgy and the people of mostly Syrian ethnic origin in the upper ranks of the hierarchy.

But it was a tragedy in the history of the East Syrian mission that even those arrangements, which should support the Christian minority against the influences from the majority, turned into the contrary and accelerated decline, when the main conditions for their efficacy had changed: when, after the breakdown of the Mongol Empire, the security on the “silkröad” could no longer be guaranteed (one of the main conditions because of the connection between the patriarchate and the eastern metropolitan sees) and when (the main condition of the whole) the vitality of the East Syrian Church in Mesopotamia itself was weakened under the troubles and persecutions, after the conversion of the Persian Mongol to Islam, and under the campaigns of Timur-Leng.

For these reasons the Christian communities in Central Asia became isolated from the Mother Church in the Middle East and finally disappeared, and they disappeared all the faster, because they had never been intended to become independent of the Mesopotamian centre of the Church of the East.

III

Eastern Christianity in its Central Asian Environment¹

One of our most important sources about the Eastern Christians in Central Asia is the report of a messenger from the Occident who visited Inner Asia in the middle of the 13th century. This was the Franciscan Friar William of Rubruck who gives us a multiform and expressive illustration of every day life in those Christian communities.²

On his journey to Qara-Qorum, the then residence of the Mongol Great Khans (near the present capital Ulan Bator in Outer Mongolia), William comes across a Christianity, which—as will be shown later—is characterized by syncretic phenomena, caused by the large majority of the non-Christian world around, which is moreover a Christianity without any interest in missionary activities. Despite all his friendly contacts with many individuals of the East Syrian Church, William generally judges

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1. Slightly modified version of the author's contribution 'Religieuze Toleranz in der nestorianischen Asienmission', in: *Glaube und Toleranz, das theologische Erbe der Aufklärung*, ed. by T. Rendtorff, Guetersloh 1982, pp. 99–112.
 2. T. Jansma, *Oost-westelijke Verkenningen in de Dertiende Eeuw* (Mededelingen en Verhandelingen van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux', vol. 13), Leiden 1959, pp. 19–36. — An English translation of his report is given by W. W. Rockhill, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World 1253–55*, transl. from the Latin and ed. with an introductory notice (Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, ser. 2, vol. 4), London 1900 (Reprint 1941).

clearly and explicitly enough. Looking at the native clergy of the Turkish Christian communities he says, "They are solicitous for their wives and children, and are consequently more intent on the increase of their wealth than of the faith. And so those of them who educate some of the sons of the noble Moal (Mongols), though they teach them the Gospel and the articles of the faith, through their evil lives and their cupidity, estrange them from the Christian faith..."³ Such severe criticism is not surprising, from a Franciscan Friar who, by the rule of his Order, is obliged to take upon himself the exhausting "peregrinatio religiosa" barefooted even in the rough terrain of Central Asia. More interesting for us than all the moral insufficiency of the people Friar William criticizes, however, is his explanation of their self-sufficiency of the lack of all missionary impetus to spread their own Christian faith, remarked by the Franciscan Friar again and again. It need not be emphasized that William is right in not attributing this lack to the East Syrian Church itself. For, even inter-denominational polemics could not ignore the fact that those Christian communities in Central Asia were the result of the energetic missionary enterprises of the Church of the East. Therefore William correctly attributes the missionary weakness to the Central Asian Christians themselves, by criticizing the efforts of the married priests for their own profit. Yet we must ask, whether or not such a profitability actually was the genuine reason of all anti-missionary self-sufficiency.

William of Rubruck got to know the Christian people of that period in Central Asian Church history, which had started with the missionary success among the Kereit, south of Lake Baykal, at the beginning of the 11th century. It was the period, which marked the real climax in the missionary enterprise of the East Syrian Church in Innermost Asia. This second period in the history of mission in Central Asia after the beginning of the second millennium A. D., compared with the preceding one, was especially marked by the close and almost exclusive connection with the native Turco-Mongol population: in Central Asia itself, starting from the tribe of the Kereit, as well as in

3. Ibid., p. 159.

China under Mongol rule. It was Marco Polo from Venice who only a few decades later completed William's description by his own experiences in China under the reign of the Great Khan Qubilai. He reports that in many towns of China he met Christians who all belonged to the Turco-Mongol ruling class and differed clearly enough from the native people by their thick beards, which were untypical of the Chinese.⁴

In contrast to the Chinese xenophobia, the Turco-Mongol population proved to be impressionable by the Christian mission. And it may be supposed that the explanation for such a positive attitude lies in the religious background of these Central Asian tribes, in their typical kind of devotion, which was characterized by the deeply rooted Shamanism.⁵ In the world of Shamanism all human life and action was dominated by the fear of the omnipresent demons and evil spirits who were a threat to all the concern of daily life. And it was the Shaman, the medicine man, who was responsible for the well-being of the people. So in this world of Shamanism all the religious interest was directed to the one problem: to cope with all the concerns of this life on earth, without a clear picture of the world which man enters after death. In fact people in the world of Shamanism could speak about an "eternal heaven", but without having any precise idea. And even if people could imagine this "eternal heaven" as a personal deity (with quite different names in the different tribes), it remained a deity in an unrecognized remoteness. People did not produce pictures of this deity, although they really had idols of the various minor deities of every day life. So we learn from Kirakos of Ganjak, an Armenian historian of the 13th century that the Mongols "had no religion or form of worship, but they used continually to mention the name of God. Whether they thanked the Being of God or called someone else God, we do not know nor did they themselves".⁶ The

4. Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. by A. C. Moule and P. Pelliot, vol. I, London 1938, pp. 215. 263 f. 277. 314.

5. For Shamanism, cf. W. Heissig, *Die Religionen der Mongolei*, in: *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei (Die Religionen der Menschheit, vol. 20)*, Stuttgart 1970, pp. 305-324. 349-420.

6. J. A. Boyle, *Kirakos of Ganjak on the Mongols*, in: *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 8 ('s-Gravenhage, 1963), p. 202.

peoples of Central Asia were not able to overcome spiritually the permanent threatening of the human life by the crowds of evil spirits and demons in this Shamnist context. They had not been capable of creating any doctrine of salvation nor any doctrine promising a paradise in the life to come beyond all troubles. Therefore, the native Turco-Mongol population of Central Asia was very impressionable to all the foreign doctrines, which could exactly explain things about the future life, and therefore Turco-Mongol people took from the foreign religions, which had come in, all that they missed in their own religious conception, without differentiating among the foreign religions and without giving up Shamanism. For this reason the native people of Inner Asia had an attitude of tolerance towards the religions from outside their country, which the Mongol Great Khans themselves shared. Friar William reports on the banquets of the Great Khan Mongke: "On such days first come the Christian priests with their apparel, and they pray for him and bless his cup. When they have left, the Saracen (Muslim) priests come and do likewise. After them come the priests of idols, doing the same thing".⁷ The question of the true faith, the difference between "orthodoxy" and "paganism" was of no importance for the Mongol believer: Such a difference disappeared behind his general awe towards the expressions and meanings of all the religions. "As God gives us the different fingers of the hand, so he gives to men diverse ways", was the simple but pious confession of the Great Khan Monke, uttered to our Franciscan Friar.⁸ The Mongol Great Khans have kept watch over such religious tolerance from Chingiz-Khan's days on who had fixed it in the so-called "Ulang Yasa" the code of his Mongol Empire, and thus had formally given it the status of a political law.⁹ Chingiz-Khan (we learn from Muslim sources) "orders that all religions shall be respected and that no preference shall be shown to any of them. All this he orders as a means to be agreeable to God"; and he "respected, loved and

7. William of Rubruck, p. 182.

8. Idem, p. 235.

9. G. Vernadsky, *The Scope and Contents of Chingis Khan's "Yasa"*, in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), pp. 354 f.

honored the learned men and monks of every denomination considering them as intercessors before God".¹⁰ In the spirit of this officially practised and guarded tolerance, Mongke summoned Christians, Muslims and Buddhists to a religious disputation, while William was present at the Great Khan's court, not without warning all the participants before, on penalty of death, not to "wrangle or insult any other".¹¹ And when on another occasion William was insulted by a Muslim, he endeavoured to conceal this event, for if the Muslim had been seized for it, he would have been put to death or soundly beaten.¹²

Among the foreign religions in Central Asia, which profited by this tolerance in the Shamanist world, was the Christian religion, represented by the church of the East, which found such a religious tolerance in Central Asia both advantageous and disadvantageous. Advantageous in so far as the East Syrian mission had been successful among the native population in converting completely or nearly completely tribes with the consequence that by the help of those Turco-Mongol people Christianity was able to penetrate into China again. The Turco-Mongol Christian communities became the fundamental bases of the metropolitan sees, the chain of which extended from the city of Samarqand in the West to Khanbaliq (Peking) in the East, demonstrating the culmination of Christian expansion after the end of the first millennium A. D. Even as the native religious tolerance had made possible such a successful mission, it halted the earlier success of the Christians, because this tolerance naturally no less favoured the other religions (viz. Buddhism, Manichaeism and Islam), which had penetrated into Central Asia and became the dangerous rivals who would eventually subdue Christianity in the Far East.

It was the most fatal consequence of the Central Asian tolerance that this attitude was carried by the Turco-Mongol believers right into the Christian communities themselves. For as a basic idea this tolerance was selfevident to each Christian believer who was acquainted with it from his own non-Christian

10. Makrizi and Juwaini respectively, cited *ibid.*, p. 349

11. William of Rubruck, p. 230.

12. *Idem*, p. 226.

past, and as a basic idea this tolerance dominated the world the Christians had to live in. Again and again we have to recall that the Central Asian Christian communities, even in their heyday, were no more than tiny islands in a mainly Shamanist environment which they remained in contact with in every day life. Moreover, one wonders, if in those remote areas the Church of the East in its missionary enterprise was at all able to obtain more than an outward success by only baptizing the native people, and if the Church was able to christianize the people in a deeper sense, achieving a strict elimination of all non-Christian machinations. In any case one feels it could hardly exceed a merely outward success, when one reads about the conversion of the Kereit that only one priest was sent, accompanied by a deacon with altar furniture, and instructed to baptize all the converts and to teach them the ritual of the Church and the orders of Lent.¹³ Although in theory the Mother Church in the Far West distinctly called Shamanism an "ungodly error" and the people in Shamanism "captive by evil devils to the worship and service of their corrupt things", adherents of "polluted religions which were established without the labour of fasting and prayer" or simply "worshippers of devils"¹⁴ its far eastern parishes kept on being impressed by the spirit of Shamanism.

To what extent this spirit had influenced the daily life in the Christian communities, we can gather from our sources. The various events of every day life, noticed and reported by the Franciscan Friar William, can be summarized in the general impression that all the regulations of the ancient Mesopotamian synods to shelter the Church from all non-Christian influences from its surroundings remained inefficient in mediaeval Central Asia. The Syrian Church of the East definitely had forbidden mixed marriages with non-Christians (at the synods of 554 and 585), and (at the synods of 410 and others of the 6th century)

13. Gregory Bar-Hebraya in his "Chronicon Ecclesiasticum" (cf. footnote 28, ch. VII). III, cols. 281 f.

14. Bidawid, *Lettres* (cf. footnote 23 ch. I), p. 124, and Syriac appendix, p. 46; *The Book of Governors, the Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga A. D. 840*, ed. and transl. by E. A. W. Budge, London 1893, vol. I, pp. 261. 268; II, pp. 480. 492.

the Church had opposed any divination, sorcery, witchcraft and amulets; and (in the year 676) the Church in Mesopotamia had opposed to all influences of pagan elements concerning Christian burial.¹⁵ But all these prohibitions by the Mother Church in Mesopotamia many centuries before did not prevent all that from being practised in mediaeval Central Asia.

As for the prohibited mixed marriages, the Christian Turco-Mongol people did not at all consider the difference between their own Christian faith and its environment to be an impediment against marriage. Numerous are the examples of marriages in the nobility even in spite of religious differences, which existed. And it was self-evident in the Central Asian world of religious tolerance that in those matrimonies both partners remained each in the religion of his/her own, without any urge to change faith. Some of the wives in the Great Khan's family were princesses of the Christian tribe of the Kereit or of other Christian tribes.¹⁶ The same absence of inhibition can be found when non-Christian princesses got married into the families of Christian princes of Central Asia. For that we have the example of the tribe of the Ongut (living at northern bow of the river Hwang-Ho) with its Christian ruling class. The princes of this tribe used to marry princesses from the imperial family of the Great Khan according to a contract with Chingiz-Khan himself, and this practice lasted throughout the Mongol period¹⁷. But such mixed marriages in the ruling class of Central Asia are only the best known examples for violating the Church law, which was disregarded by the lower people as well. Marco Polo describes in his report that in the country of Turfan, Christians were married to "idolaters"¹⁸, and the Franciscan Friar William was acquainted even with Eastern Christians married in polygamy according to the

15. *Synodicon Orientale* (cf. footnote 17 ch. I), pp. 24. 102. 106. 116. 150 f. 158. 225. 548 f. / 264. 359 f. 363 f. 375 f. 411. 418. 489. 559.

16. Cited in footnote 9 of chapt. II.

17. Marco Polo I, p. 182; Enoki, *Nestorian Christianity* (cf. footnote 29 ch. I), p. 46. – In addition (regarding Christianity among the Ongut), cf. footnote 30 below.

18. Marco Polo I, p. 156.

habits in the Mongol Empire and according to the manners of the nobility.¹⁹

Even the attacks of the Mesopotamian Church against all pagan divination, sorcery and witchcraft could not hinder the Turco-Mongol Christians from remaining in the dominating belief in demons and ancestor spirits, and from resorting to all the remedies, which Shamanism offered to cope with earthly life. And how could any one doubt the truth or necessity of those practices, which were rooted in the omnipotent environment? Naturally even Christians in Central Asia protected themselves with amulets, they made Shamans peep into the future and they practised the commonly known divining by magic sticks, but they did these while (an interesting syncretic phenomenon) reciting verses of Psalms instead of magic spells!²⁰ That Christians did not shrink back from sorcery, was demonstrated during William's stay at the court by an East Syrian priest's wife who was caught attempting to bewitch the Great Khan Mongke himself²¹. All those details together demonstrate, how in the Central Asian Christian communities Christian faith and Shamanism was combined into a new unity, into a useful co-existence. The Christian faith could satisfy the piety concerning life beyond human death, and Shamanism by means of its superficial practices was able to ensure the well-being in the permanently endangered earthly life. Precisely in this sense two episodes which are reported by William from the last days of an archdeacon's life complement one another²². When this man was nearing his death, his friends sent for a Shaman to look for the cause of the sickness, and he traced it to the curse of a certain man, whose compensating blessing was then searched for. This episode concerns the mastering

19. William of Rubruck, p. 158. – For polygamy according the Christian and Mongol laws respectively, cf. *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 224 / 489; Vernasky, *Scope*, p. 357.

20. For more details, cf. W. Hage, *Christentum und Schamanismus, zur Krise des Nestorianertums in Zentralasien*, in: *Traditio-Krisis-Renovatio aus theologischer Sicht*, ed. by B. Jaspert and R. Mohr, Marburg 1976, pp. 116–120. – Regarding divination by magic sticks, especially cf. William of Rubruck, p. 195.

21. *Idem*, pp. 243 f.

22. *Idem*, pp. 216–218.

of the problems of earthly life.. But the next day, shortly before his death, this archdeacon, looking beyond earthly life, proved himself to be a Christian, confessing in the face of the consecrated host in the hands of the Franciscan Friar: "I believe that this is my Creator and Saviour, who gave me life, and will give it me again after death at the general resurrection".

Where belief and action were thus derived from totally different religious roots, the canons of the ancient synods of the East Syrian Church which were opposed to pagan elements at Christian burials came to be disregarded. Our Franciscan Friar on his way through Innermost Asia came upon a tomb, which was fitted out according to Shamanist customs by horse skins on long perches, by meat for the recently dead, and by koumis (the fermented milk from a mare). William, being rather astonished, adds this to the description: "And for all that they said of him that he had been baptized"²³.

The just mentioned koumis served as the basis of the time-consuming and popular banquets of the Mongols, and at the same time it was considered as a sacred beverage. In their attitude to this koumis we can recognize in a very obvious manner the religious carelessness of the Eastern Christians of Turco-Mongol origin in comparison with the believers of the other Christian denominations. Less numerous than the native Christians in Central Asia were the Christian people from abroad: Russians, Greeks, Alans. All these people abstained from this pagan sacred beverage and considered its drink as apostasy from the Christian faith²⁴. On the contrary, the Turco-Mongol believers of the East Syrian Church did not make any difference to the non-Christian native people, for being Christians they accepted the koumis as an element even with its ritual character. We learn from our sources that already the first Christian prince of the Kereit at the beginning of the 11th century kept a special mare among his horses, the milk of which was usually set up in front of the cross and the Holy Scriptures; then he said prayers and blessed it

23. Idem, p. 82.

24. Idem, p. 87.

with the cross and drank it together with his companions²⁵. According to William's report, two centuries and a half later, we find the East Syrian priests acting with their censers among the representatives of the other religions, when all the Mongol people, celebrating spring festival, drove together all the white mares to be consecrated and sprinkled new koumis on the ground²⁶. The same koumis, which in the eyes of those Christians from abroad was just a symbol of apostasy from the Christian faith, was fully integrated into Christianity of the Turco-Mongol people; in their church at Qara-Qorum it was as highly esteemed as it was in the tent of the Great Khan. We know this from the Franciscan Friar who one day saw this episode: Mongke Khan 'entered the church..., and they brought him a gilded couch, on which he sat beside his (Christian) lady; facing the altar... Then drink was brought, rice mead and red wine... and cosmos (koumis). Then the lady, holding a full cup in her hands, knelt and asked a blessing, and the priests all sang with a loud voice, and she drank it all... When they were all nearly drunk, food was brought... And so they passed the day till evening. And when the lady was already tipsy, she got on her cart, the priests singing and howling, and she went away. The next Sunday came the daughter of the Chan, whose mother was a Christian, and she did likewise... (and) gave the priests to drink till they were drunk...'”²⁷.

The Turco-Mongol Christian communities, which were to such a degree open to the world around, also could easily get under the influence of the other religions, which had penetrated Central Asia and which – as mentioned above – had profited in their missionary success from the same tolerance of the Shamanist people. Therefore we must not be surprised about Christian tombstones from the Far East with Buddhist symbols²⁸ and about a “most learned priest” among the Eastern Christians who was convinced of the idea of reincarnation²⁹. A most impressionable example of the religious

25. *Maris Amri et Slibae de patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria*, ed. and transl. by H. Gismondi, vol. I, Roma 1899, pp. 113 / 100.

26. William of Rubruck, pp. 241 f.

27. *Idem*, pp. 185 f.

28. Enoki, *Nestorian Christianity*, pp. 49 f. 61.

29. William of Rubruck, p. 231.

tolerance practised as a matter of fact was, at the end of the 13th century, the ruling prince George of the above mentioned Ongut, a member of that noble Christian family, which was by treaty of matrimony joined with the imperial family of the Great Khan. Prince George, indeed, proved himself to be a true Christian, especially after changing his denomination. He was born and educated as a member of the Syrian Church of the East, and he was a priest as well, until he was convinced by the Franciscan Friar John of Montecorvino (who a little later became the first Roman Catholic Archbishop of Khanbaliq / Peking) to convert to Catholicism. Then he was ordained deacon according to the Latin rite, he built a Catholic Church (the relics of which were found some fifty years ago) in his small capital, and he assisted John of Montecorvino at the Latin mass³⁰. At the same time, however, this George was an admirer and eager sponsor of the Chinese culture, which there in the eastern part of Central Asia had a great influence on the educated upper classes. As the manifestation of this George sponsored Confucianism, and though it really was the rival to his own Christian faith, he built temples and schools for the Confucianists in his territory, and he arranged the printing of a Confucianist book³¹.

From the example of prince George of the Ongut we can learn that such a general religious tolerance in the region of Central Asia could not lead to a systematic christianization by the political authority to form something like an "established Church". Naturally, it was regarded as an extraordinary occasion, when in these centuries the Syrian mission

30. Reported by the Archbishop himself in one of his letters, cf. C. Dawson, *The Mongol Mission, Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, London / New York 1955, pp. 225 f. – N. Egami, *Olon-Sume et la decouverte de l'eglise catholique romaine de Jean de Montecorvino*, in: *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 240 (Paris, 1952), pp. 155–167. – For Christianity among the Ongut in general, cf. Enoki, *Nestorian Christianity*, pp. 45–51. 77–80.

31. Ch'en Y., *Western and Central Asians in China Under the Mongols* (*Monumenta Serica Monographs*, vol. 15), Los Angeles 1966, pp. 55–57; T. F. Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westward*, 2nd ed., New York 1955, p. 87.

occasionally succeeded in winning the ruler of a tribe for Christianity for the ruler could at least set an example to his people by his own conversion. The main difference, however, between the character of the missionary enterprises of the Christian Churches in Central Asia and elsewhere is quite clear: in Central Asia we hear nothing about any christianization by force. Without any prospects of a christianization by the help of a political authority the Church of the East had to content itself with its minor place under the protection and strict control of the general religious tolerance, supervised by the Great Khan himself. In this frame the Great Khans could more or less favour this or that religion, and some of them more or less favoured Christianity. But this was by no means a decision for Christianity itself and against all the other religions or even against Shamanism. Therefore, it was of little importance whether or not the Great Khan himself had been baptized like Guyuk or his successor Mongke.³² With the help of a Great Khan who favoured the Christian faith Christianity did not become an "established Church", and even the baptized Great Khan Guyuk himself, whom Gregory Bar-Hebraya called "a true Christian"³³, remained quite in tune with his environment, which was shaped by the all-dominating Shamanism.

We have penetrated deeply enough into the religious world of Central Asia to recognize the main reason for the lack of any missionary impetus among Turco-Mongol Christianity. Perhaps there was also the motive of profitability, as the Franciscan Friar supposed. But the main reason for the self-sufficiency of the Christians in the Far East was the spirit of Central Asia: The shamanist spirit of religious tolerance, which permitted a successful activity to all religions, but which was too powerful to let Christianity maintain its characteristic attitude of an exclusive orthodoxy. Therefore among the Christians in Central Asia the traditional Christian claim to exclusiveness disappeared. This view may be confirmed once

32. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise* (cf. footnote 10 Ch I), pp. 159 f. 161 f.

33. *Chronicon Syriacum* (cf. footnote 27 Ch. III), p. 481; Budge, *Chronography* (cf. *ibid.*), I p. 411.

again by the observation of Franciscan Friar William, about a visit of East Syrian priests to the sick bed of one of Mongke's non-Christian wives: "These miserable priests had never taught her the faith, nor advised her to be baptized. ... The priests do not condemn any form of sorcery; for I saw there four swords half way out their scabbards, one at the head of the lady's couch, another at the foot, and one of the other two on either side of the entry. I also saw there a silver chalice, of the kind we use, which had perhaps been stolen in some church in Hungary, and it was hung on the wall full of ashes, and on the ashes was a black stone; and these priests never teach that such things are evil. Even more, they themselves do and teach such things³⁴. Understandably, our Franciscan Friar does not think of these priests as being capable of representing the christian faith correctly in the face of the other religions. When the Great Khan Mongke had summoned Muslims, Buddhists and Christians to the religious disputation mentioned above, the native Christians presented a dogmatic survey of the history of salvation from the creation on. In this survey William found some censurable statements in the doctrine about the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and about his Second Coming and the Last Judgement. He taught the native Christians better when at last they chose him as spokesman in the first place in the religious disputation. And therefore, in the disputation with the religions of Asia the main representative of Christianity was the Friar from the Occident.³⁵

All these details may be considered as manifestations of "tolerance" in the religious world of Central Asia, which proved so fatal for the Christian faith of the native people in those areas. I think, we must pay attention to three points.

(1) This tolerance was by no means a kind of religious indifference, resulting from a theoretical or practical atheism. Nor was it the result of the estimation of religion as a private affair without any interest from the political authority. Religious tolerance in mediaeval Central Asia was not the tolerance in

34. William of Rubruck, pp. 194 f.

35. Idem, pp. 228-235.

a modern sense. This we can gather from the attitude of the Great Khan himself who because of his piety was interested in the blessings on the part of all the religions together. In this context tolerance does not mean indifference, but all-embracing devotion.

(2) With regard to the Christians in Central Asia we must note that the religious tolerance with the subsequent syncretism was not the expression of an intended missionary method, viz. method of accommodation. Such an active attitude would demand a most subtle consciousness of the essentials of the Christian faith and a high theological ability to judge the possibilities and limitations of tolerable *adiaphora*, which our sources do not at all reveal. In this respect the tolerance and syncretism among the Christian communities in the East Syrian Church in mediaeval Central Asia were quite different from the famous example of religious tolerance with syncretic elements, which was quite consciously practised by the Jesuits in China in the early 17th century.³⁶

(3) The religious tolerance with all its consequences was not practised deliberately by the native Asian Christians, but it was accepted by them unconsciously as a matter of course. This tolerance was an expression of the prevailing religious mood of the country Christianity was involved in, a mood of a deep devotional awe of the numinous. Every day life among the Turco-Mongol Christians in Asia was characterized by a form of piety, which sometimes broke the limits of a traditional Christian faith. All that our Franciscan Friar William describes as despicable syncretic phenomena was neither the expression of indifference nor a missionary method of accommodation, but it was (to use a Latin expression) "*praxis pietatis*", life in devotion and piety in a deep sense. This devotion and piety in Central Asia, however, had blurred the limits between Christianity and the other religions, and therefore, this Eastern Christianity in Central Asia grew into the alienation from the East Syrian Mother Church, even before the connecting lines between the East and Mesopotamia

36. J. Bettray, *Die Akkomodationsmethode des P. Matteo Ricci in China*, Roma 1955.

were interrupted and the Turco-Mongol Christians became isolated.

But when this isolation was completed the Christians in the Far East lacked the necessary impulses of their Mother Church to keep up the genuine elements of their Christian faith, and they disappeared under an increasing syncretism, at last overcome by the other religions of Asia. Hardly more than a hundred years after William's visit to Central Asia, at the end of the 14th century, we no longer hear anything of those remote Christian communities of the Church of the East, the most successful missionary Church of the Middle Ages. Thus the religious tolerance in Central Asian Church History emerges as a significant factor. This tolerance prompted by the indigenous Shamanism, which had favoured the missionary enterprise of the East Syrian Church among the Turco-Mongol people, weakened their Christian faith and made it disappear at last in the Central Asian syncretism: this religious tolerance in the mediaeval world of Asia is, in my view, the most important factor in Central Asian Church History in general.

IV

The Christian Community in the Oasis of Turfan¹

In the previous lecture we had glanced at Central Asian Christianity and its piety and devotion, which came as we could recognize, under the considerable influence of Shamanism. But there was also an encounter with the other religions on a more official, viz. literary level. The consideration of this topic leads us to the Eastern Christians in the oasis of Turfan in the northern part of the basin of the river Tarim, which site became famous by the immense number of literary fragments, mostly of Buddhist and Manichaean origin, discovered there.

Let me first make some general remarks about Christianity in this interesting place. Our sources are mainly the relics and the literary documents in Syriac, Iranian (Soghdian) and in ancient Turkish (Uighur) languages found there,² for we have no reports from outside: neither the description of an attentive visitor from the Occident like the Franciscan

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1. Slightly modified version of a paper ("Das Christentum in der Turfan-Oase, zur Begegnung der Religionen in Zentralasien") presented on the occasion of a Symposium on Central Asiatic subjects held at St. Augustin, Germany, in May 1983.
 2. For these documents, cf. O. Hansen, *Die christliche Literatur der Sogdier*, in: *Iranistik, Literatur (Handbuch der Orientalistik, ser. 1, vol. 4,2)*, Leiden / Koeln 1968, pp. 91-99 (regarding Soghdian texts); A. V. Gabain, *Zentralasiatische tuerkische Literaturen I*, in: *Turkologie (ibid., ser. 1, vol. 5, 1)*, Leiden / Koeln 1963, pp. 217. 222 f. 227 (regarding Uighur texts).

Friar William³ nor any reference by anyone of the Syrian Church historians, who on the whole have no clear idea about things in the East beyond the Oxus. Nevertheless, the documents and relics allow us to draw at least a rough picture.

At Turfan, as all over the Far East, the Christians formed only a religious minority among a population of mostly Buddhists and partly Manichaeans.⁴ In all probability their centre was situated north of the ancient city of Turfan in the foothills of the mountains of Tienshan. For there, near the place Bulayiq, most of the Christian literary fragments were found among badly damaged walls, which are considered to be the ruins of an ancient Christian monastery.⁵ The Christians of Turfan had a second establishment at least, some distance away, outside the eastern walls of the city of Khotcho (Idiqutshahri). There was a small church, decorated with wall-paintings, dating from about 900 A. D.⁶ This fixed point in Church History of Turfan can be extended on the basis of the discovered literary documents to the period roughly bet-

3. With the only exception of Marco Polo's short remark about inter-marriage, cf. footnote 18, Chapt. III and footnote 30 Chapt. IV

4. A. V. Gabain, *Das uigurische Koenigreich von Chotscho 850-1250* (Sitzungsberichte der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse fuer Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst, 1961, vol. 5), Berlin 1961, p. 69; eadem, *Einfuehrung in die Zentralasienkunde*, Darmstadt 1979, pp. 42-56 passim.

5. A. V. Le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan*, *Berichte und Abenteuer der II. und III. deutschen Turfan-Expedition*, Leipzig 1926, p. 88 (with map, p. 36); A. v. Gabain, *Das Leben im uigurischen Koenigreich von Qoco (850-1250)* (Veroeffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica, vol. 6), Wiesbaden 1973, p. 31.

6. Le Coq, *Hellas Spuren*, pp. 63 f. (with map, p. 41); idem, *Chotscho, Facsimile-Wiedergaben der wichtigeren Funde der Ersten Koeniglich-Preussischen Expedition nach Turfan in Ost-Turkistan*, Berlin 1913, plate no. VII; Saeki, *Nestorian Documents* (cf. footnote 6, Ch II), pp. 417 f. with plate no. XII); *Museum fuer Indische Kunst Berlin (Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz), ausgestellte Werke (catalogue)*, ed. by H. Haertel, Berlin 1976, p. 141 (no. 540. 541) (with dating).

ween the 9th and 14th centuries,⁷ even though we cannot exclude the possibility that some pieces of this literature to have not been written where they were found, but had been brought there from other areas. By that Christianity at Turfan can roughly be set into the period of the Uighur Kingdom, which lasted from 850 to 1250, and into the following period of the Mongol Empire.

Our literary documents clearly show that the Christians of Turfan had formed part of the ethnic variety in this cultural centre of Innermost Asia. Since the discovered fragments are mostly written in the Soghdian language, and to a smaller extent in ancient Turkish (Uighur), we can presume the presence of Christian people of both ethnical groups (viz. Iranians and Turks) in analogical relation. Therefore, while Eastern Asian Christianity, after the conversion of the Kereit in the early 11th century, was essentially represented by the Turco-Mongol population - as seen at Qara-Qorum - Christianity in the oasis of Turfan was dominated by Soghdian speaking Iranians, and some of their Christian Soghdian terms impressed the texts of their Turkish speaking fellow believers. But we cannot conclude from such a dominance of Soghdian texts that Soghdian had been a liturgical language even for non-Iranian people, because the official liturgical language among the Christians of Turfan was Syriac itself. Literary fragments written in this language, too, have been found at Turfan, and their liturgical character sufficiently demonstrates that the official language of the Syrian Church of the East was used in the service of these Central Asian people as well.⁸ The local vernaculars, however, had not been completely excluded from the church, as we learn from the contents of the native Christian texts from Turfan. There we find lectionaries of the

7. For dating, cf. Gabain, *Einfuehrung*, p. 49 (9th-12th century); and in addition: W. Radloff, *Uigurische Sprachdenkmaeler*, Leningrad 1928, *passim* (some juridical documents with partly Christian proper names up to the middle of the 14th century).

8. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen* (cf. footnote 21, Ch II), pp. 137-141.

biblical pericopes according to the Church Calendar in a Soghdian version⁹ to make at least the Iranians partly understand the divine service. These two aspects in the Christian communities in Central Asia, the cultivation of the native languages by translations, and insistence on Syriac as the official language of the liturgy, was characteristic – as we have already seen – of the Syrian Church of the East with its chain of metropolitan sees all over the continent from Samarqand in the West to Khanbaliq (Peeking) in the East.

We do not hear, however, anything about the hierarchic affiliation of the Christian congregation of Turfan. A metropolitan did not at all exist in the territory of this oasis, because we do not find a name in relation to this area, in the official lists of the metropolitan sees of the Syrian Church of the East, nor do we hear anything of a local bishop being, a suffragan of any metropolitan. Therefore, we can only presume that the Christian at Turfan were subordinated to one of the well-known neighbouring centres, perhaps to that of Hami in the East, where there was a bishop in the second half of the 13th century, or perhaps to the city of Almaliq on the river Ili in the West, which was a metropolitan see at least in the 14th century.¹⁰ But the late date of both these hierarchic centres show clearly, how uncertain is our supposition regarding Turfan's place in the hierarchic order of the Church, because even the period of the Uighur Kingdom already ends in the middle of the 13th century.

Therefore, the picture we can draw from the East Syrian Christians of Turfan remains rather imperfect, and our knowledge is limited to those materials, which have survived at Turfan itself. These relics cannot answer all our questions; but they can say something to us about the situation of the small Christian community in its non-Christian environment. They show how the life of the Christian minority was determined by the non-Christian majority.

9. F. C. Burkitt, *The Religion of the Manichees*, Cambridge 1925, pp. 119–125.

10. Dauvillier, *Provinces* (cf. footnote 2 Ch II), pp. 305. 308.

That there were influences from outside bearing on the Christian community is evident. The Christian literature of Turfan itself attests this clearly, for among a lot of books on medicine of non-Christian origin there is one written in Syriac characters and that points to Christian authorship¹¹; and among some Buddhist and Manichaean texts of divination there also was found one composed by Christians.¹² So we may interpret these two texts as reflecting the intention of a minority to join the spirit of the world around it through its own contributions.

But these examples are peripheral ones. Regarding the Christian texts, we are interested mainly in the question if these documents contain any theological echo to the challenges of the powerful competitive religions around. To this question we can give only an incomplete answer as long as the Christian texts from Turfan are not published in their entirety. In general we can notice that the Christians at Turfan were not influenced by foreign terms or ideas as much as the Christians in China were during their first period up to the 9th century under the rule of the Tang dynasty. From the Christian Chinese literature of that earlier period we learn that there were influences mainly from the side of the Buddhists who later on could easily receive that literature in their library at Tunhwang in Western China, where it was discovered in our time.¹³

The question of the influences of the foreign religious environment upon the Christian Turfan texts requires an answer, but this can be given in different ways on the basis of the same observations in the same texts. The interpretation of a specific theological element in the text may lead to quite different results, if it is interpreted in quite different contexts. For this purpose the discussion between the scientific departments, the interdisciplinary discussion between Church History and Sciences of Religion, will be stimulating. A colleague of

11. Gabain, *Zentralasiatische tuerkische Literaturen* p. 223.

12. W. Bang, *Tuerkische Bruchstuecke einer nestorianischen Georgspassion*, in: *Le Museon*, vol. 39 (Louvain / Paris, 1926), pp. 53-64.

For Christian Chinese literature, cf. footnote 22, Ch II above.

mine, Dr. Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Professor of the Study of Religion at the University of Bonn/Germany, has devoted himself to the study of the history of the non-Christian religions in Central Asia. He knows Central Asian Buddhism and Manichaeism best, and he is especially interested in the contacts between those religions and Eastern Christianity. Let us take up the materials offered by him.¹⁴

We are told that among the Soghdian Christians at Turfan there was, indeed, a response to the world of the non-Christian religions around. This is demonstrated by a fragmentary text of the "Acts of George", which is – as usual in the Christian Turfan literature – translated from a Syriac prototype.¹⁵ But the Soghdian version in one passage of the fragment modifies the Syriac text in a characteristic manner: While the Syriac text mentions an evil pagan deity without giving it a proper name, the Soghdian version identifies it with the Indian deity "Mahakala", known from the Buddhist environment; and makes this addition manifestly with a polemical intention, as Dr. Klimkeit emphasizes.¹⁶ From this example we may conclude that there existed among the Christians of Central Asia apologetic and polemic interests in defending Christianity and in opposing the other religions. This is manifest in such literary products on the higher level of theological responsibility, quite distant from the piety and devotion of those simple believers in the world of Shamanism which we have seen earlier.

According to the expert on Central Asian Manichaeism we can moreover see the apologetic-polemic attitude of the Christians from their strong emphasis on physical resurrection

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14. H. – J. Klimkeit, *Christentum und Buddhismus in der innerasiatischen Religions-bewegung*, in: *Zeitschrift fuer Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 33 (Koeln, 1981), pp. 208–220.
 15. O. Hansen, *Berliner soghdische Texte I: Bruchstuecke einer soghdischen Version der Georgspassion (C 1)* (Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse, 1941, vol. 10), Berlin 1941.
 16. Klimkeit, *Christentum*, p. 216, referring to the interpretation of the Soghdian text by Hansen, *Berliner soghdische Texte I*, pp. 27–29.

after death,, as we can find in the just mentioned version of the "Acts of George" and in addition to that in the Soghdian "Bar-Shabba-Fragments" and "Simon-Fragment".¹⁷ All these texts have this in common that they stand in strong opposition to any form of dualism by stressing the Christian idea of the resurrection not only of the soul but also of the human body¹⁸. To these Soghdian texts we can add a Christian Turkish (Uighur) one, which contains an apologetic-polemic intention too, although its theme is different. I have in view the 'Fragment of the Magicians'¹⁹, which reports about the visit of the Three Wise Men from the East to the manger at Bethlehem, with their gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh, and – as our text adds – remedy, which are – as we shall see later on – interpreted in an apologetic – polemic sense.

But here we must recall the above mentioned general sentence of phenomena, which can be differently interpreted according to the different contexts they are connected with. Indeed – so I can agree with the Professor of the Study of Religion – There is a context, which makes our texts speak very distinctly. This context is the religious environment around the Christian texts, the religious environment of Turfan itself or of Inner Asia in a wider sense. In this context the Christian position appears very strongly and with emphasis. For by stressing the physical resurrection our Christian documents, indeed, sharply oppose the quite different ideas of Buddhism and Manichaeism. With this our texts contain exactly what the small Christian community of Turfan clearly distinguishes from those much more powerful other religions. And in such a situation of competition, texts of that kind can protect one's own position against foreign influences from outside (apologetically), or they can (polemically) attack the opposing theology. The latter may especially be demonstrated even more distinctly by the ancient Turkish

17. F. W. K. Mueller, *Soghdische Texte II*, ed. by W. Lentz, in: *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Berlin 1934, pp. 522–531, 603.

18. Klimkeit, *Christentum*, pp. 215 f.

19. Bang, *Tuerkische Bruchstuecke*, pp. 43–53.

“Fragment of the Magicians”, containing an interpretation of the Wise Men’s gifts. In the religious world of Turfan (or of Central Asia in general) there exists a strong emphasis on this interpretation of the gifts far beyond the words of the story itself.²⁰ According to our text the gifts are offered to the Christ Child in order to test his nature. For by accepting the gold, or the frankincense and myrrh, or the remedy, he will reveal himself to be a ruler designate, or Son of God, or physician respectively. But the Child accepts all the gifts together, revealing himself to be a ruler (our Turkish text says: “Khan”), Son of God and a physician as well. And that means in the Central Asian context: The Lord Jesus proves to be the only legitimate holder of these titles (Son of God, Khan), which the Christians know from the non-Christian world around, and by claiming these titles as Christ’s own, the Christians reinforce their attitude against the non-Christian traditions of Central Asia. And moreover, by accepting the remedy and proving to be the physician too, Christ in our text reveals himself to be the only legitimate physician and Saviour, who addresses himself to the listener of these words in the world of Central Asia, which attributes these titles to Buddha.

This is the main context in view of which our texts can be interpreted: the Christian Soghdian and Turkish texts in their environment, in which they had been shaped and in which they were read. But at the same time the same texts must also be – seen within quite another context. Being documents of Christian origin they firstly exist in the line of their own Christian tradition itself, in the line of the tradition of the Syrian Church of the East. Here we must remember the fact that the above mentioned Christian texts from Turfan differ decisively from the older Christian Chinese literary documents in that they are not original compositions, but – directly or indirectly derived from Syriac prototypes – translations or at the most free renderings.

This must be assumed with regard to the “Fragment of the Magicians”, which either received its present shape in

20. For the following, cf. Klimkeit, *Christentum*, pp. 216 f.

the now existing ancient Turkish version, or, more probably, faithfully followed a Soghdian text, which for its part had enlarged a Syriac prototype. But it should be noted that an important element was added to the Syriac prototype: the interpretation of the Wise men's gifts with the intention of testing the nature of the new-born Child and the response of the Child by accepting all the titles. This passage is missing in the apocryphal "Gospel of James", which in view of the shape of its story apparently stands behind our version.²¹ Nevertheless, our text from Turfan with this supplement offers practically nothing new, for its interpretation of the gifts has had a long history. The Syriac "Book of the Cave of Treasures" dating from the end of the 5th (or early 6th) century already sees the Child as the physician designate, symbolized here by the myrrh,²² corresponding to that ancient Syriac tradition, which knows the Saviour of the world to be the Saviour from physical disease as well, as he is known from the healings in the New Testament. Already in the early 4th century this theme is implied in the legend of the christianization of the city of Edessa depicted in the story of its King Abgar and his correspondence with Jesus. The divine descent of Jesus is seen in that he is the miracle-working physician and he is asked to come to Edessa in order to heal the King of his incurable disease. Jesus then sends his apostle Addai (Thaddaeus), by whom at last Abgar is baptized and physically healed as well.²³ Further on this theme remains alive in the tradition of Syriac Christianity, so that Christian faith and medicine go together nearly programmatically.²⁴

In the context of Christian tradition naturally even those texts have their place, which deal with the idea of a physical

21. *Protevangelium Iacobi*, cap. 21.

22. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, transl. by E. A. W. Budge, London 1927, p. 208.

23. *Ancient Syriac Documents Relative to the Earliest Establishment of Christianity in Edessa and Neighbouring Countries*, ed., transl., and annotated by W. Cureton, London / Edinburgh 1864 (Reprint Amsterdam 1967), pp. 1-5, and Syriac appendix, pp. 1-5.

24. A famous example for this is the Syriac Orthodox Maphrian Gregory Bar-Hebraya in the 13th century, who was renowned also for his medical capability, cf. our lecture no. VII (with footnote 14 Chap. VII

resurrection of mankind. The "Simon-Fragment" (with its story about the raising of a man from the dead) is derived from the apocryphal "Acts of St. Peter",²⁵ which through such a miracle builds up into a detailed story what Christ himself had said to his disciples: "Go nowhere ... and preach as you go ... Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons".²⁶ The same motive is evident in the "Bar-Shabba-Fragments", for the translator of the biography of this bishop, who in the 4th century had established the bishopric of Marv (that important centre for missionary enterprise in Central Asia), could not be motivated by his non-Christian environment to take from his prototype that curious story about the dead and buried Bar Shabba who after four days came out of his tomb in order to return to his episcopate for fifteen more years until his final death.²⁷

The same Christian texts from Turfan simultaneously standing within various contexts, therefore, can be interpreted in different ways. One context, for looking at these texts, in relation to the non-Christian religious world around, is that of the apologetic and polemic intention, stressed by the expert in Central Asian Buddhism and Manichaeism. The other context of the same Christian texts from Turfan is of documents of the Syrian Church of the East, standing in the dependency on their own Christian traditions. Each of these contexts leads to its own interpretation concerning the character of Christianity at Turfan.

According to the first context Dr. Klimkeit summarizes: "That the physical resurrection, and by this the approval of the physical and of the material world, is stressed in this way in the faith of the Syrian-Soghdian community in Central

25. *Acta Petri*, cap. 28.

26. *Matthew* 10:5-8.

27. Regarding this story (according to the Arabic "Chronicle of Seert"), cf. P. Kawerau, *Bar Sabba und die Christianisierung von Merw*, in: *Christlich-arabische Chrestomathie aus historischen Schriftstellern des Mittelalters*, vol. I (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 370 = *Subsidia*, vol. 46), Louvain 1976, pp. 26 f., with annotated German translation *ibid.*, vol. II (*ibid.*, vol. 385 = vol. 53), 1977, p. 87.

Asia, becomes clear, if we consider that the Nestorian (East Syrian) Christianity just in this point differed from the docetism of Manichaeism and Buddhism".²⁸ – But with regard to the other context (looking at the conditions of the genuine Christian tradition itself) we must modify this résumé in its concluding part: That the physical resurrection, and by this the approval of the physical and of the material world, is stressed in this way, becomes clear, if we consider – that the East Syrian Christians (not regarding all the surrounding religions and ideas) even in this point simply stood in the Christian tradition of their own East Syrian Church.

I do not mean that the one interpretation of our texts replaces the other because both interpretations together give us the answer to the problem of the position of the small Christian minority in the midst of the religious world of Central Asia. And with the double result of the double interpretation, according to the double context we can draw the following picture.

(1) The small Soghdian and Turkish speaking Christian community at Turfan stands completely in the traditions of its East Syrian Mother Church, whose ecclesiastical centre is far away, indeed, but which is present by means of the common Syriac language in the liturgy. In spite of the overwhelming majority of the other religions, we cannot find any strong syncretism in the native versions of Christian texts compromising their own genuine Christian tradition. Our texts from Turfan on the whole are orthodox in the sense of the orthodoxy of the Syrian Church of the East.

(2) Certain elements of this Christian tradition distinctly contradict the theological ideas, which are powerfully represented in the world around the Christian community especially by Buddhism and Manichaeism. Texts with such controversial

28. "Dass die koerperliche Auferstehung und damit die Bejahung der Koerperlichkeit und der Welt eine offenbar so zentrale Rolle im Glauben der syrisch-sogdischen Gemeinde Zentralasiens spielte, wird verstaendlich, wenn man bedenkt, dass sich das nestorianische Christentum gerade an diesem Punkte vom Dokerismus des Manichaeismus und Buddhismus unterschied": Klimkeit, Christentum, p. 215.

elements must (even as only literal translations) have had quite another sound in the world of Central Asia than in the world of their literary prototypes. I mean here those texts of the Christian Turfan literature, which we can interpret as apologetical and polemical ones, even if they did not have such a tendency originally. But whether or not the Christians of Turfan understood those texts as having these tendencies, we cannot be certain. Texts like the "Bar-Shabba-Fragments" and the "Simon-Fragment" cannot be recognized exactly as a Christian response in the encounter with the religions in Central Asia.

(3) Surely there are some Turfan texts, which have an apologetic or polemic tone in their Central Asian environment and were composed intentionally with this tendency. Among this group we must count the "Fragment of the Magicians" with its polemic intention against competing pretensions in the non-Christian world around. This is clear from the tenor of the words of the divine Child in the manger. Accepting all the gifts of the Three Wise Men Child Jesus emphasizes three times "so am I": "Son of God - so am I; a ruler (Khan) - so am I; a physician and Saviour - so am I".²⁹ But - as we have already seen - the new polemic element is no more than the tenor of the text, using no materials other than its own Christian tradition offers. Even the title of a "physician" as we have seen, was a well-known element in Syrian Christian tradition itself. But it has avoided the use of new elements in the polemics such as may be seen in the Soghdian version of the "Acts of George". The new element here is the use of the Buddhist "Mahakala" in a negative sense to signify the depraving deity for which there is no proper name in the Syriac prototype. This is a very distinct Christian response to the challenge of the religious majority around.

(4) From this observation we may conclude that the above mentioned version of the "Acts of George" originated at that place, where it had been discovered, and this would be an important premise in forming a picture of the Christian community in the oasis of Turfan. The picture that emerges

29. Ibid., p. 217.

is as follows: a small community, not only in a more passive manner possessing the assorted documents of a rich Church tradition (with elements which, in the situation of Inner Asia, sound like apologetic-polemic ones), but also an active community with the theological experience and capacity not only to translate the Syriac prototypes into their vernaculars, but also to actualize the Christian faith with regard to their present situation at Turfan.

(5) Consequently we could form a rather favourable opinion about this small Christian community of Turfan. This cannot be stressed enough, because such a high theological level was by no means typical of Eastern Christianity in Central Asia everywhere, as we have seen in the picture given by the Franciscan Friar William of the Christian people of Central Asia at Qara-Qorum in the further east. But we cannot really compare those communities with one another, because the report of William and the literary documents of Turfan describe quite different levels of Central Asian Christianity. While at Turfan we meet the official theology in the fixed form of literary texts, in the communities of William's report, we meet with the unofficial living piety and devotion of the simple people. There is no critical observer from whom we can learn about the daily life, the expressions of piety and devotion among the simple people at Turfan.³⁰ And we know from Church History in general (even outside the history of Syrian Christianity) that the official theology of the Church and the practised piety of its people are quite different things.

Therefore, we must be rather cautious in forming a high estimation of the Christians at Turfan, because we cannot take into account the shape of layman's every day devotion there. Probably one day we will have to modify our picture. I say "modify", not "change", because our rather high estimation of the Christians at Turfan for the time being will remain at least with regard to the theological thinking of those Christians in Innermost Asia between the 9th and 14th centuries.

30. With, as far as I know, the only exception of Marco Polo (cf. footnote 18, Ch III above) who knows of intermarriage: a certainly significant detail, even if not so much instructive with regard to piety as to the lesser authority of the official Church law.

V

Christian Influence in the World of Central Asia¹

The theme of the preceding lectures was the relationship of the Central Asian Christians to the religious world around them and the consequence of that upon the Christian communities themselves. We shall now take a searching look at the contribution by the Christians to the life and culture in Innermost Asia. Preliminary to this we have once again to recall the general situation of Christianity there.

(1) Middle eastern representatives of the Syrian Church of the East (Syrian and Persian people) were present in the Central Asian countries as long as Christianity flourished there. We find them as missionaries or as delegates to ascend the far eastern metropolitan sees, and we find them all the time as merchants on the "silk road", dwelling in the more important trading centres on the long route from Samarcand to China.

(2) In view of the ethnic origin of its people, Christianity in Central Asia did not remain the religion of foreigners from the West, but it had deeply penetrated among the native peoples themselves. Christians were converted from Soghdians, Tibetans, and mainly from the various Turco-Mongol tribes

1. Slightly modified version of the author's contribution, "Kulturelle Kontakte des ostsyrischen Christentums in Zentralasien", in: III Symposium Syriacum 1980, Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures, ed. by R. Lavenant (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, vol. 221), Roma 1983, pp. 143-159.

who, from the early 11th century until its decline in the late 14th century, became the main representatives of Christianity in Central Asia as well as in China under the Mongol rule. On account of this Turco-Mongol element Christianity had its heyday in the history of its spread in the Far East during that period after the transition from the first to the second millennium.

(3) In spite of all the missionary success among the Turco-Mongol people including the conversion of even members of the Great Khan's family, Central Asian Christianity throughout its history remained the religion of only a small minority. Although there existed some larger Christian communities in the more important centres, in the vast expanse of the Asian continent these communities formed only tiny islands, separated from each other by long distances.

(4) "Pluralism" seems a rather weak word to characterize this Central Asian world. We can see this from the fact that the "Prussian Turfan Expeditions", in the beginning of our century, discovered numerous fragments of literary documents, written in seventeen different languages and in twenty-four different alphabets². These numbers indicate a huge ethnic and religious variety. For in these territories of Central Asia, in the realm of native Shamanism—as we have seen—all the religions and philosophical systems from the East and from the West had come together: Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism, Manichaeism and Islam, and competing with all these Christianity too.

This survey once again shows clearly the threat to the Christian minority, exposed as it was to a lot of influences from the world around. We need only recall how Shamanist ideas had penetrated deeply Central Asian Christianity affecting the faith, piety and devotion of the Christian people³. On the other hand we can recognize that Syriac Christianity on its part had also some influence on the peoples of Central Asia and the Central Asian civilization.

2. Museum fuer Indische Kunst (cf. footnote 6 chap. IV, p. 105.

3. Cf. the topic of our lecture no. III.

On the linguistic field the influence of the East Syrian Christian tradition can hardly be ignored, because the Syriac language of the Church had remained all the time among the native Christians. As we have seen already the Syrian Church of the East was not interested in accepting various vernaculars for liturgical languages in place of its own Syriac. In this they were like the Latin Roman Church in the Far West, but unlike the other Oriental Churches. Apparently as we have seen, the common liturgical language was considered as an important bond between the remotest Christian communities and the Mesopotamian patriarchate. Thus the imported Syriac remained present in Central Asia as a foreign element, present at the centre of all religious activity, guaranteeing the permanent influence of western cultural traditions on the Christian people of Central Asia⁴. This presence and influence of Syriac was important in spite of the fact that the native Christian people generally grasped their Church language only imperfectly. The knowledge of Syriac waned in proportion to the distance of a region from the centre of the Church in Mesopotamia. In the territory of the Ongut at the north bend of the river Hwang-Ho, among the people of the already mentioned Christian prince George, there have been found several Christian tombstones written in Turkish with only a few passages in Syriac⁵, while at the same time in the West, near Lake Issyk-kul in the area of the present city of Alma Ata, the native Christians had written countless tombstones in Syriac with only small portions in their own native Turkish language. The Syriac used was not without mistakes but it shows that they had made use of the foreign Church language even outside the divine service.⁶

For obvious reasons the always present Syriac influenced the vernaculars by single words and phrases, and "christianized" them according to the Syriac tradition. This influence, of course, firstly concerned the terms of Christian theology and

4. For the following, cf. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen* (cf. footnote 21, ch II), pp. 131-160.

5. Enoki, *Nestorian Christianity* (cf. footnote 6, chap II), 50 f.

6. Regarding these tombstones and their poor Syriac, cf. footnotes 14, chap. II 24, chap. II above.

Church affairs, which were accepted by the native people automatically with the new religion itself, such as: “amīn”, “mhaymnā” with (fem.) “mhaymantā” (“believer”), and the titles “meṛpōlīṭā”, “apīsqōpā and “qasiā” (“priest”)⁷. But native people took over in their Turkish language even such a common and not typical Christian term as “qabrā” (“tomb”), which we regularly find in the few Turkish written inscriptions near Lake Issyk-kul as well as on the Turkish tombstones of the Ongut in the further East. We also can find that elements of Syriac (and with this the East Syriac Christian tradition) crossed over the fence around the small Christian communities. So the non-Christian Mongols, too, came to use such traditional Syriac titles as “mār(y) hasyā” (to address the bishop) and “rabban” (to address the priest or the monk), analogously applying them to the corresponding representatives of the Latin Roman Catholic Church who had come into the East. In the time of the Great Khan Guyuk, the friend of the Christians who was himself baptized, we are told that Mongol people in general (not only Christian believers) used to greet one another by using the Christian Syriac blessing “barrek mar(y)” (bless, o Lord”)⁸.

In this context we should also take a brief look at the rich material of the proper names, mainly those on the tombstones of the native Christians. From these stones we can learn that Turco-Mongol members of the Syrian Church of the East bore their traditional Turkish names as well as newly introduced Christian ones, the latter naturally in their Syriac form. These show a rich variety. The most striking among these proper names are the typical East Syrian compositions of the name of Jesus (in the East Syriac form “Isō’”), such as: “‘Abdīsō’”, “Hnānīsō’”, “Sabrīsō’”, and the theological

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7. For references (including the following), cf. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen*, pp. 144 f.
8. Reported by the contemporary Gregory Bar-Hebraya in his “Summarized History of the Dynasties” (cf. footnote 30 chap. VII), cited F. Risch, *Johann de Plano Carpini, Geschichte der Mongolen und Reisebericht 1245-1247* (Veröffentlichungen des Forschungsinstituts fuer vergleichende Religionsgeschichte an der Universität Leipzig 1930), p. 329.

terms (or names of feasts), which had become proper names in the East Syrian Church, such as: "Yaldā"; ("Christmas"), "Denhā" ("Epiphany"), "Qyāmā" (Resurrection", "Easter") and so on.⁹ Such names were known in Central Asia from the fellow-believers from the West, and (the last mentioned group of names) were also heard again and again in the various liturgical parts of the divine service according to the Church Calendar. And likewise biblical names of the Old and the New Testament were used in great numbers, and they too, naturally occur in their Syriac form.

Such a phenomenon may not appear unique because it occurs all over the world, where native people enter the Christian heritage. This was however, mentioned here so as to take into account all the elements of the Christian Syriac influence on the peoples of Central Asia.

Therefore, we also must not pass over the traditional chronology, used by the Syrian Christians in the Near and Middle East, which came to Central Asia along with the Christian mission. The inscriptions on the tombstones in the area of Lake Issyk-kul clearly demonstrate again, how elements of the native Turkish cultural tradition met the imported tradition from the West. Principally and sometimes exclusively the native Christians there gave the date of death according to the traditional Central Asian Animal Cycle of twelve years starting with the "Year of the Mouse" (or "Rat"), and beginning the New Year in the middle of January.¹⁰ But on the majority of the tombstones, in addition to that, we find the western chronology according to the "Era of the Seleucids", beginning the New Year from 1 October; and sometimes added to this we find the name of the week, taken from the first phrase of the Sunday hymn according to the Church Calendar. These phenomena clearly indicate, too, the influence of the liturgical life of the East Syrian Church on its people in the far eastern parishes.

9. For more details and references, cf. Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen*, pp. 141-143.

10. A converting table into years A. D. is given by V. Grumel, *L'chronologie* (Bibliothèque byzantine, traité d'études byzantines, vol. 1) Paris 1958, p. 308.

The Syriac language of the liturgy contributed – as we have seen – some terms and phrases to the vernaculars of the native Christians. Syriac alphabet at the same time became the model for a wider use, because “Estrangela”, brought in along with the Syriac language itself, was used in the immediate sphere of the East Syrian mission not only in Syriac texts as usual, but also in the vernacular ones. Thus the Christians in the area of Lake Issyk-kul made use of the “Estrangela” in their mostly Syriac inscriptions as well as in the few Turkish ones; and the Ongut people far in the East, who composed their inscriptions exclusively in Turkish, wrote them in Syriac characters too. And the same practice concerning the epigraphical material of Central Asian Christianity can be found in the local Christian literary documents. There are even Turkish and Soghdian texts, written in the Syriac “Estrangela”.¹¹ By this the Syriac language, representative of the western cultural tradition, demonstrated its ability to compete successfully, at least among the Christian peoples, with the other alphabets of Central Asia, which we shall deal with later.

The existence of literary documents in the native languages leads us to another aspect of Christian Syrian influence in Central Asia, which must not be neglected. Though the East Syrian Church essentially insisted on Syriac as the liturgical language, it at the same time endeavoured to teach the Christian faith by means of the various vernaculars of the Central Asian peoples. The aforesaid parallel to the Latin Church of the West regarding the importance of a common liturgical language has now to be modified in so far as the East Syrians for their part, in the course of their missionary enterprise, brought into being Christian Oriental literature in various languages. The missionary efforts may especially be demonstrated by the numerous Christian Chinese documents, beyond our present topic, regarding the Central Asian situation.¹² But Central Asia had its native Christian literature as

11. Gabain, *Einfuehrung* (cf. footnote 4. chap IV), p. 68; Hage, *Einheimische Volkssprachen*, pp. 132 f. 134 f. 154 f.

12. For Christian Chinese literature, cf. footnote 22, cha II above.

well, which consists of Soghdian and ancient Turkish (Uighur) texts, as we have already seen in regard to the Christian community of Turfan. Taking into consideration those texts again and examining their topics we can recognize two different kinds of literature. Firstly, there are the Biblical texts in the form of lectionaries to be used in the divine service, within the frame of the generally Syriac liturgy, in order to address the simple people immediately. But secondly, there are texts in the vernacular, which brought Christian ideas to the native people even outside the service. And it was these texts, which familiarized the central Asian believers with the Near and Middle Eastern Syrian traditions of Christian faith, piety and life, as they could be found in the Apocryphal Literature, in the Legends and the Acts of the Martyrs, the Apostolic Canons, the "Apophthegmata Patrum" (the sentences of the Fathers of the Desert), and in other writings¹³. It is not astonishing that Central Asian Christians under the influence of such literary documents had accepted several motives from a far away world into their own history, into their own self-interpretation to create their own Christian Central Asian traditions. Such a new-born tradition among the Christian people of Innermost Asia was recorded by Sempad, an Armenian author, who in the middle of the 13th century wrote a letter to the King of Cyprus, telling him that from the country of the Tanguts in the Far East had come the Three Wise Men, who had brought the Christian faith from Bethlehem to their native land, and whose portrait was deeply venerated then by the Christian Tangut people¹⁴. Indeed, such a portrait of the Three Wise Men was found on a tombstone from about that time in the area of Chienshan in Manchuria¹⁵.

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13. For Christian Soghdian and Turkish (Uighur) literatures, cf. footnote 2, ch IV above.
 14. Cited F. Risch, *Wilhelm von Rubruk, Reise zu den Mongolen 1253-1255* (Veroeffentlichungen des Forschungsinstituts fuer vergleichende Religionsgeschichte an der Universitaet Leipzig, ser. 2, vol. 13), Leipzig 1934, pp. 5-11 (especially p. 8 f.).
 15. Saeki, *Nestorian Documents* (cf. footnote 6, ch II), p. 442 (with plates no, XXI f).

This portrait leads us to the final aspect of our survey, which must be looked at least briefly. It is strikingly evident from the excavations and the records from Inner Asia that there existed pictures and paintings among the mediaeval Central Asian Christians, which the modern adherents of that Church of the East will not countenance in their religious life. Those Christian pictures in mediaeval Central Asia demonstrate (beyond their Christian topics) the cultural influence of the West in those territories, which were characterized in general by quite other traditions of art. I can only remark here (other authorities agree on this) that the Christian wall paintings in the oasis of Turfan (from about 900) recall Early Christian and Byzantine prototypes, and differ in their stylistic feature clearly from the Indo-Iranian and Chinese artistic traditions dominant there¹⁶. But unfortunately we do not know whether the creators of these paintings were Syrian Christians from among the West or Central Asian native people who had accepted the influence from the West in order to continue the western cultural tradition in the East even on their part.

We may summarize the details given hitherto, in the following way: In the course of Syrian missionary enterprise some cultural elements from the Christian West penetrated deeply and in a manifold manner into the life of the native Christian population modifying their Central Asian native traditions. In this the missionary field of Central Asia for its part confirms a well-known and world wide phenomenon of Christian mission, if not of all religions, in general. But this realization implies at the same time that all the cultural influences from Christianity in the West concern only the tiny realm of the Central Asian Christian people. None of the aforesaid aspects (of language, terminology, proper names, chronology, alphabet, literature and art) broke up the narrow frame of Central Asian Christianity itself, nor did they open the door to the non-Christian world around. And the few Christian phrases mentioned above used even by non-Christian Mongols are by no means sufficient to contradict this point

16. B. Rowland, *Zentralasien* (Kunst der Welt, vol. p 42), Baden-Baden 1979, pp. 202-207.

of view. Therefore, we must pose the question explicitly: Was the barrier between the Christian and the non-Christian world really insurmountable for Christian Syrian cultural influences? Are there no symptoms of such influences outside the Christian communities in the Central Asian world? In seeking an answer to these interesting questions we must enter rather unexplored fields of research. We must also recognize that these nearly unexplored fields lie beyond the realm of Church History, so that we need the help of scholars from outside. I do believe that it is possible to get an answer to these difficult questions with the help of the authorities in the fields of Philology and Religious Studies.

Philology is competent in the history of the development of the Central Asian alphabets. It has been known for a long time that the Mongolian characters officially used in the administration of the Mongol Empire, were derived step by step from the "Uighur script" in the 13th and 14th centuries¹⁷. Since this "Uighur script" is quite similar to the Syriac alphabet, scholars had come to the conclusion that the Uighur characters directly depended on the Syriac ones (especially on the East Syriac style), and they regarded this as a result of East Syrian missionary activities in Central Asia¹⁸. Let us for a moment think on the importance of the Mongolian alphabet (with its off-shoots including the Manchu alphabet) for the cultural life in Central Asia, until it was replaced by the characters of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet in our own days. That would, indeed, have been an impressive influence on the part of East Syrian Christianity far beyond its own Christian realm; but recent scientific research has destroyed this flattering view of things. We know now that the relationship of the "Uighur script" to the Syriac alphabet was not so direct, because the relationship of both (Syriac and Uighur) alphabets were not that of "mother and daughter", but rather of "aunt and niece": The Uighur characters were independent of the Syriac ones; they had descended (mediated by the Soghdian)

17. H. Jensen, *Die Schrift in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1958, pp. 389-392.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 387 f.

from an older Aramaic alphabet, from which the Syriac "Estrangela" also was derived¹⁹. This knowledge, however, about the system of dependence on each other does not deprive the East Syrian Christians of all significance because they had nevertheless a share in the history of the development of the Central Asian alphabets, although in a less striking manner than was assumed in the past. The Far Eastern Christians themselves, composing their texts in the native languages did make use not only of the Syriac "Estrangela", but also of the Soghdian and mostly of the Uighur alphabets²⁰. When in the 13th century the less civilized Mongols, for the administration of their new empire, accepted the script (and at first the language too) of the subjugated but more civilized Uighurs, the Turco-Mongol Christian people also took part in this process and under Mongol rule ascended to the highest ranks in the government, including the ministerial offices²¹. Although the above mentioned Central Asian alphabets were not the immediate descendants of the script of the Syrian missionaries, Eastern Christians had an important role in the cultural life of Asia. In the service of the Mongol rulers they wrote the Uighur language and taught it to the illiterate majority. As told by the Franciscan Friar William in the middle of the 13th century, the secretaries of the Mongols were principally Uighurs, whose script could be read by nearly all native Christians. The same western author knew about several Christian priests who educated the sons of the Mongol nobility and of the imperial family of the Great Khan. Some of those prominent Central Asian Christians are known to us by their names²². This Christian participation in a culturally important place did not disappear in the course of history without leaving any trace. For although the Central Asian scripts themselves were not the immediate result of the Christian mission there, the characteristic style of writing them was. The already quoted scholar of Indo-European Philology, Hans Jensen,

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 386. 388. – For Soghdian, Uighur and Mongolic scripts, also cf. Gabain, *Einfuehrung*, pp. 62–72.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 70 f.

21. Cf. footnote 8, ch II above.

22. William of Rubruck (cf. footnote, 2, ch III), pp. 150. 159. 189. 206. 212 f.

draws our attention to the fact that the Mongolian script with its daughters, and sometimes the Uighur script as well, arrange the letters not horizontally but vertically placing the lines side by side from the left to the right²³. The prototype of this cannot be found in the world of the culturally dominant Chinese who, indeed, write likewise in vertical lines, but arrange them in the opposite direction, from the right to the left. The prototype of the Uighur–Mongolian arrangement of the lines (from the left to the right) can be found only in the Syriac script of the Eastern Christians. Indeed, the Syrians did not generally write their documents from the top downward in vertical lines, but there exist several Syriac inscriptions written in just this way: the already mentioned tombstones in the area of Lake Issyk–kul (13th / 14th centuries) as well as the famous Chinese and partly Syriac monument of Shianfu (8th century), and even several earlier inscriptions in the Syrian Middle East itself²⁴. The Mongol style of writing according to the Syriac prototype would exactly correspond to our knowledge about Christian secretaries among the Mongols and the presence of Syriac as the liturgical language of the Church of the East. – This is the contribution of Philology regarding the influence of Eastern Christianity on the wider world of Central Asia outside the Christian community.

The contribution of Science of Religion in answering our question is given by Hans–Joachim Klimkeit who has recently published his views regarding the “Relations of Christology with Buddhology in Central Asian art”²⁵. In his publication he deals with the syncretic use of the symbol of the cross on the portraits of Buddha in a West Tibetan monastery in the 11th or 12th century. Dr. Klimkeit’s findings, however, do not directly concern our topic. In the Buddhist use of the cross he supposes the influence of the Manichaeans, because original Christian ideas could be more easily accepted

23. Jensen, *Schrift*, pp. 394 f. (including the following).

24. For details, cf. Hage, *Kulturelle Kontakte*, p. 157 in footnote 42.

25. H. – J. Klimkeit, *Das Kreuzsymbol in der zentralasiatischen Religionsbegegnung, zum Verhaeltnis von Christologie und Buddhologie in der zentralasiatischen Kunst*, in: *Zeitschrift fuer Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 31 (Koeln, 1979), pp. 90–115.

by the Buddhists, if they were presented in the format of a dualistic-docetistic Christology, represented in the religious world of Central Asia by the influential community of the Manichaeans²⁶. But in a broader context such a syncretic phenomenon may be taken as an example of the common observation that in the manifold religious world of Central Asia the various religions inter-act, especially when their adherents had to live closely together in an area, which was, – as noted already, characterized by native Shamanism and its spirit of tolerance, which was conducive to all kinds of syncretism. With regard to this general situation, it is possible that the Central Asian Manichaeans, in using the symbol of the cross, were inspired by their Christian neighbours, especially because the sign of the cross was deeply venerated by the Central Asian Christians at the centre of their piety, as we can learn from many excavated cross-shaped amulets²⁷. Thus if (by the theological arguments) we are obliged to suppose that the symbol of the cross in Buddhist paintings had been influenced directly by the Manichaeans, we shall have to take note at least of the indirect contribution of the Central Asian Christians to that syncretic phenomenon.

At the present state of research we can hardly say anything more about Christian influences on the religious world around, but we can hope to enlarge our knowledge one day on a more certain basis. And in the pursuit of a more satisfying result we should at least remember the interest of the Buddhists in the heritage of Central Asian Christianity after its decline. Buddhist monks settled in a deserted Christian monastery near Khanbaliq (Peking), and at Tunhwang in Western China they took over the portrait of an East Syrian Saint, interpreting him as Bodhisattva, and actually placed some texts of Christian Chinese literature in their famous library in

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–115.

27. Especially from the Ongut territory, cf. L. Hambis, *Notes sur quelques sceaux-amulettes nestoriens en bronze*, in: *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 44 (Paris/Hanoi, 1951), pp. 484–525; Saeki, *Nestorian Documents*, pp. 423–425 (with figures). – For veneration of the cross among the people at Qara-Qorun, cf. William of Rubruck, pp. 139–191. 193.

the "Caves of the thousand Buddhas" along with other writings of non-Buddhist origin²⁸.

The above discussion leads us to certain general conclusions. Christian Syrian presence in its broad missionary activity did not remain without any cultural consequences to the world of Central Asia. We have found them in the Central Asian Christian realm and in the world around as well. In my opinion the latter aspect must be considered the more important and the more interesting one, because Syrian influence on the native Christian people of Inner Asia disappeared along with these Christians themselves, and nothing but some archaeological relics remained. Answering the question what actually has been left over from mediaeval Central Asian Church History, we can only answer looking at those fields, where Syriac Christianity could act upon in the world of Central Asia beyond the limits of its own Christian communities. We must suppose that not yet all our sources have been inquired into as systematically as possible so as to answer all the questions. But more results can hardly be expected from Church History itself; we must wait for the results of further research in the fields of Central Asiatic Studies. The results gained until now gives us hope for more in the future, to be gained from the collaboration of Church History with History of Religion, Central Asiatic Philology, Ethnology and History of Arts. We are still waiting for the final verdict about the importance of Syriac Christianity and its tradition for the culture and civilization of Central Asia. In the meantime, however, on the basis of results gained so far we might say that the important missionary period of the Syrian Church of the East, which came to its end half a millennium ago, did not disappear from the territories of Central Asia without leaving any trace.

28. Regarding monastery, portrait, and library respectively, cf. Saeki, *Nestorian Documents*, pp. 429-433 (with plates no. XVI-XX and figures); G. Schurhammer, *Der "Tempel des Kreuzes"*, in: *Asia Major*, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1928), pp. 254 f. - Saeki, *op. cit.*, pp. 416 f. (with plates no. I and XI), A. Waley, *Christ or Bodhisattva?*, in: *Artibus Asiae* (Hellerau, Dresden, 1925-26), p. 5, (with plate no. IV). - P. Pelliot, *Une bibliotheque medievale retrouvee au Kan-sou*, in: *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient*, vol. 8 (Hanoi 1908), pp. 501-529.

VI

Yahballaha III

The Mongol Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East¹

On 21 February 1281 expired the Catholicos-Patriarch Denha I at his residence in Baghdad, and as often enough in the long history of the Syrian Church of the East a successor had to be elected. But this time the result of the election was remarkable, because it marked a departure from the tradition of the Church. The man who was installed as the new Patriarch, Yahballaha, was not a Syrian from Mesopotamia the spiritual centre of the East Syrian Church; he was from China, a member of the Turco-Mongol people of Central Asia. No another event could have more clearly demonstrated that the Syrian Church of the East had grown into an universal one.

The remarkable election in the year 1281 resulted from the often mentioned important missionary success, which had opened a new period in the history of Far Eastern Christianity after its decline in the 9th century. It was that second and more successful period after the conversion of the Kereit south of Lake Baykal in the early 11th century, when the Church of the East succeeded more and more in penetrating the Central Asian native population of the Turco-Mongol tribes. Christianity then was spread even among those people, which

1. Annotated version of the author's biographical essay, "Yahballaha III.", in: *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, ed. by M. Greschat, vol. IV: *Mittelalter II*, Stuttgart 1983, pp. 92-101.

in the early 13th century was united by Chingiz-Khan to be the nucleus of his growing Mongol Empire, so that the Great Khans themselves – as we have already seen – came into contact with the Christian religion. In this context one point must be stressed again namely the intermarriage between the Great Khan's family and the families of Christian tribal nobilities.² Chingiz-Khan himself, who as an orphan had been bred in the tent of the Christian Kereit ruler, had married a princess from this tribe and his son and successor Ogedei was married, probably, likewise to a Christian wife from the tribe of the Merkit. Their son Guyuk, who was baptized and educated under the care of a Christian priest, after his accession to the throne, especially favoured the Christians in his company, regardless of the often mentioned general religious tolerance of Shamanism. Among the princesses representing the Christian faith in the highest ranks of the Mongol government should be mentioned Sorghoqtani the Kereit.³ She was the niece of that Kereit ruler who had adopted the orphan Temurdjin (who later on changed his name to "Chingiz"), and at the instance of Chingiz-Khan she was made the wife of his fourth son Tolui. On account of her husband's early death Sorghoqtani was assigned a less important role outside the ruling line of the imperial family, but she was ambitious enough to promote her own interests. Under Guyuk's rule she could gain the third rank of authority next to the Great Khan himself and his mother, and after Guyuk's death the ambitious lady finally succeeded in getting the throne for her husband Tolui's line. Two of her sons, Mongke and Qubilai, became Great Khans in succession; and a third one, Hulagu, was the founder and first ruling II-Khan of the Mongol Empire of Persia. But all the time the Kereit princess remained Christian according to her own religious tradition; she presided over a Christian household, and she took care of Christians of all denominations in the area of the imperial residence of Qara-Qorum, even if they were slaves, like a French goldsmith from Paris, captured by

2. Cf. footnote 9, ch. II above.

3. For this princess, especially cf. Howorth, *History* (cf. footnote) 8. ch. II) I, pp. 170 f. 542. 559. 725; III, p. 90; P. Pelliot, *Le vrai nom de "Seroctan"*, in: *T'oung Pao*, vol. 29 (Leiden, 1932), pp. 43-54.

the Mongols in Hungary.⁴ She soon became popular even outside her own East Syrian Church and was highly esteemed by the contemporary Syrian Orthodox Gregory Bar-Hebraya in far western Mesopotamia, who treasured her memory and said: "She was a Christian, sincere and true like (queen) Helena. And it was in respect of her that a certain poet said. If I were to see among the race of women another woman like this, I should say that the race of women was far superior to that of men".⁵ Sorghoqtani's own East Syrian fellow believers did not cease to remember her with honour even in the first half of the 14th century, nearly a hundred years after her death. At this time - as we are told - the people honoured her portrait in one of the churches at Kanchow in the western part of China.⁶ Sorghoqtani's own children only partly followed the faith of their mother. Her three ruling sons (Mongke, Qubilai, Hulagu) did not profess Christianity officially, but were kindly disposed towards the Christians, as Marco Polo from Venice found, when he was in Qubilai's service in China. And in their families further on there were Christian princesses, even though none of them gained such importance as the famous Sorghoqtani.⁷ Because of those Christian elements in the Mongol dynasty the rulers even of the Il-Khanid state of Persia had at first favoured the Christians in their realm. The above mentioned first Il-Khan Hulagu himself had married a princess of the Kereit tribe, and his son Abaqa's wife was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Paleologus.⁸

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4. L. Olschki, Guillaume Boucher, a French Artist at the Court of the Khans, Baltimore 1946, p. 5.
 5. Chronicon Syriacum (cf. footnote 27, ch VII), p. 465; Budge Chronography (ibid) I, p. 398.
 6. R. Grousset, L'empire mongol, 1 re phase (Histoire du monde, vol. 8, 3, 1), Paris 1941, p. 544.
 7. For more details (concerning Mongke, Qubilai, and Hulagu), cf. Hage, Weg nach Asien (cf. footnote 1, ch. II), p. 380 in footnote 100.
 8. For Hulagu's and Abaqa's wives, especially cf. E. A. W. Bulge, The Monks of Kublai Khan Emperor of China, London 1928, pp. 107 f.; J. M. Fiey, Chretiens syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Persie, XIIIe-XIVe s) (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 362 = Subsidia, vol. 44), Louvain 1975, pp. 19-23, 32 f.

This was the world of that man who, in the late 13th century, had been elected Catholicos-Patriarch of the Syrian Church of the East, after he had left his far eastern home.⁹ Mark (his original Christian name) was born in 1244/45 in the city of Kawshang, north of the bend of the river Hwang-Ho, the capital of the Christian rulers of the Ongut people.¹⁰ Mark's family was of this tribe, and his father was the Arch-deacon of the East Syrian Church in that place. But the young Mark left his home in the Ongut territory in order to become a monk. With this aim in view he covered a distance of fifteen days journey eastwards and joined the elder fellow tribesman Rabban Sauma who was dwelling as a hermit in a cave in the mountains near Khanbaliq (Peking). In this place Mark lived under his spiritual father's guidance for many years, until the two monks decided to start on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Palestine. This happened during the time of Qubilai Khan, who was ruling since 1260. The plan for such a journey was not at all a pure invention, because caravans of merchants had always passed through the Asian continent on their way from China to the West along the ancient "silk road", the security of which was guaranteed by the Mongol authorities. In this way Mark and his master arrived in Mesopotamia without any risk, but they failed in continuing their journey, because of the dangerous situation beyond the Mongol realm. And they were never to see the Holy City of Jerusalem, the longed for destination of their pilgrimage in the Empire of the Mamluks of Egypt, because there were other duties to be performed.

Denha I who had just become the Catholicos-Patriarch in the autumn of 1265 recognized the utility of the foreign monks in view of their double affinity to the East Syrian Church and to the Mongol ruling class. So at first they were

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9. His biography originally written in Persian (including history of his patriarchate) is well preserved in a Syriac version: *Histoire de Mar-Yaba-laha*, ed. by P. Bedjan, Paris/Leipzig 1895, pp. 1-205; English translation by Budge, *Monks*, pp. 119-306. - Regarding this biography and Yahballaha's life, cf. Jansma, *Oost-westelijke Verkenningen* (cf. footnote 50), pp. 41-48.
10. The most famous member of this dynasty was George, cf. our lecture no. III with footnotes 30 and 31 above.

engaged by the newly elected head of the Church to supply him with the Il-Khan's certificate of appointment;¹¹ and then they were designated as candidates for two exalted positions of the Church in the Far East, which the Catholicos-Patriarch Denha had to fill in 1280 (then already at the end of his pontificate): The elder Rabban Sauma was appointed "Visitor-General" for the Christian communities in the Far East, and the younger Mark was consecrated "Metropolitan of the See of Kathay and Wang" (i. e. China) by the new name of "Yahballaha".¹² But neither of them was able to take up his position, because at first their journey was hindered by violent quarrels in the Oxus area, and then the death of the Catholicos-Patriarch Denha in February of the following year 1281 finally kept both of them from going to the East.

Yahballaha who had really been chosen for the position of the Metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of China, was then elected Catholicos-Patriarch: the third of this name.¹³ He ascended the throne in November 1281 and was to hold it for exactly thirty-six years. Yahballaha III had become the Patriarch of the East Syrian Church at a time still characterized by the enmity of the Mongols against Islam and their kindly disposition towards the Christian people. The Il-Khan Hulagu's son and successor Abaqa himself proved to be a close friend of the head of the East Syrian Christians, not least because of their common ethnic origin. Abaqa had backed Yahballaha's election with all his political authority, and he himself bore the costs of the magnificent enthronement ceremony in the church of the ancient city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The Mongol ruler heaped all honours on the Mongol Patriarch: he gave him the authority to act in the name of the Il-Khan¹⁴, and granted him the privilege to collect taxes for the purpose of the Church. But only a few months after Yahballaha's election his patron died, and in the following two years there

11. *Histoire*, p. 25; *Budge, Monks*, pp. 144f.

12. *Histoire*, pp. 28 f; *Budge, Monks*, pp. 147 f.

13. *Histoire*, pp. 33-33; *Budge, Monks*, pp. 152-157; *Fiey, Chrétiens*, p. 39.

14. For this meaning of the "Paizah" given him by the Il-Khan, cf. *Budge, Monks*, pp. 60-63.

were forebodings of future troubles.¹⁵ Abaqa's brother and successor, who was the son of Hulagu and grandson of the above mentioned Kereit princess Sorghoqtani, had been baptized as a child by the Christian name of "Nicholas", but afterwards he embraced Islam and became Il-Khan by the name of "Ahmad". His rule marked the first unfriendly act against the Christian people in the Il-Khanid state: the highly esteemed Catholicos Patriarch was put into prison for over a month, and was released only by the intercession of the Il-Khan's mother. But the tide turned again; the Il-Khan Ahmad was murdered in 1284 and succeeded by Abaqa's son Arghun who favoured the Christians just as his father had. Arghun did even more: he pursued the ambitious plan to destroy the Muslim power in the Near East. A quarter of a century before (in 1260), his grandfather Hulagu's army under a Christian Mongol commander-in-chief had been decisively defeated by the Muslim Mamluks of Egypt in Palestine, and Arghun decided to face this enemy for a second time. The objective of his campaign was the Holy City of Jerusalem, and therefore he tried to get military help from the Crusaders who at that time were hard pressed by the Mamluks in their last bases on the shore of the Mediterranean.

The emissary who was to canvass support for Arghun's idea in Europe (for a second time after a first attempt in 1285), from the Christian rulers and the Pope of Rome especially, was recommended to the Il-Khan by the Catholicos-Patriarch. It was Yahballaha's spiritual father and respected fellow of so many years who was commissioned to go: Rabban Sauma, together with some companions, set out in the year 1287, equipped with letters and gifts from the Il-Khan for the sovereigns of Europe and from the Catholicos-Patriarch for the Pope.¹⁶ Rabban Sauma's report of his journey to the West corresponds to some extent to Marco Polo's report of quite

15. For the following, cf. *Histoire*, pp. 39-46; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 158-164. For detailed history of all the Il-Khans during Yahballaha's patriarchate, cf. *Cambridge History* (cf. footnote 33) V, pp. 364-406; Fiey, *Chretiens*, pp. 41-80.

16. *Histoire*, pp. 47-49; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 165-167

the same time.¹⁷ Like the foreigner from Venice who is surprised at the strange world of China in the Far East, Rabban Sauma marvels at the Far Occident seeing it with the eyes of a Far Eastern Christian who twists the foreign names and terms as curiously as Marco Polo does and who on his way is much less interested in his political orders than in the holy places and relics of the Saints in the realms of Christian Europe.

Rabban Sauma was more than a year on his way, visiting Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Emperor, Italy with its centre of Western Christianity in Rome, Paris and the South-East of France, which in those days was under English rule. Everywhere the curious stranger demonstrated merely by his outward appearance, in what remote territories Christianity had been spread by a Church outside the authority of the Pope of Rome. And everywhere Rabban Sauma was received with honours: by the Byzantine Emperor and the Kings of France and of England as well as by the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV. But with regard to the military project of the Il-Khan this long journey did not bring any success at all. The great alliance between the Mongols and the Christian world failed. This alliance might well have changed the political and religious situation in the Near East with all its consequences for the further history of Islam and Christianity, including the final decision of the Mongols themselves in favour of this or that religion. Whatever the reasons, the Occident did not suitably respond to the offer from the East, and in the same year, 1291, when the Il-Khan Arghun died, the Crusaders lost Akko, their last Palestinian base, to the Mamluks.

But with regard to Church History in the narrow sense Rabban Sauma's journey to the West did not remain without any result, because by that the Roman Curia became acquainted with a Christian Church which was only vaguely until then

17. Rabban Sauma's report has been included in his Patriarch's biography: *Histoire*, pp. 49-84; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 167-196. - Regarding his journey, cf. Jansma, *Oost-westelijke Verkenningen*, pp. 48-54; Fiey, *Chretiens*, pp. 47-49. - For Marco Polo, cf. footnote 4, ch. III above.

known. The East Syrian Rabban Sauma did not deny his Antiochenian ("Nestorian") Creed¹⁸ which was, indeed, "heterodox" in the Roman Catholic view, but he was not treated as a "heretic". He was allowed, moreover, to present the East Syrian liturgy to the "Mar Papa", and Rabban Sauma himself took part in the Roman mass, receiving the "Eucharistic Mystery" from the hand of the Pope himself.¹⁹ Finally Nicholas IV sent back the Syrian monk to the East with rich gifts for his Catholicos-Patriarch, including a "Bull which authorized him to exercise Patriarchal dominion over all the Children of the East".²⁰ This was an understandable act in view of the Roman attempts in those times to unite the various Oriental Churches with the Catholic Church under the Pope's supremacy. After this gesture with respect to the Church of the East, the Pope could wait for a response from that part of Christianity. Sixteen years later Yahballaha III responded to that initiative by sending his Creed to Rome, concealing all dogmatic differences under some general phrases and stressing as clearly as possible the primacy and authority of the Roman Pope over the Christian people everywhere.²¹ Those sentences in the Patriarch's letter to Rome, however, did not demonstrate the traditional self-confidence of the ancient Church of the East.²² Nevertheless, an official unification was not executed, since the Catholicos-Patriarch in the last decade of his long pontificate was preoccupied with problems of quite another kind.

Under Arghun's and his brother and successor Geikhatu's rule (until 1295), Yahballaha was at the summit of his patriarchate.²³ His authority in the Mongol government and the

18. The text of this Creed is given: *Histoire*, pp. 58-60; Budge, *Monks*, p. 175.

19. *Histoire*, pp. 77-79; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 190-192.

20. *Histoire*, pp. 83 f.; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 195 f.

21. The Patriarch's Creed is still extant (but not given in his biography itself); for its Latin version verbatim, cf Budge, *Monks*, pp. 97-100.

22. "But we have no right to assume that this views represented those of the Nestorian Church in India, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Syria", as Budge, *op. cit.*, p. 100 adds.

23. *Histoire*, pp. 86-93; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 198-204.

founds repeatedly granted to him clearly demonstrated that the two sons of the late Abaqa favoured the Christians as well as their father had. The official centre of the Church was still the city of Baghdad with the patriarch's residence in the former Abbasid palace, which had been transferred to the Christians after the Mongol conquest of the city and the murder of the last Caliph. But Yahballaha himself rather preferred the neighbourhood of the Mongol court in Azerbaijan, mostly dwelling in the city of Maragha, where he built two great churches with a new residence, using it to welcome the Il-Khans as his guests.

The Patriarch's situation and the conditions of his Church soon took a turn for the worse. The death in 1294 of his spiritual father and intimate friend Rabban Sauma was a hard blow for Yahballaha²⁴. An year later revolts shook the Il-Khanid state, in which Islam became powerful.²⁵ The Il-Khan Gelikhatu was killed, his successor Baidu could hold on only for a few months, and finally Arghun's son Ghazan who became the Il-Khan (like all his successors) officially professed Islam. The Muslim people of perisa took advantage of the new situation and full of hate they attacked the Christians who had been favoured until then over the Muslims. The Muslims killed many Christians, destroyed the churches or turned them into mosques, broke into the Patriarch's residence to pillage it, and repeatedly ill-treated the Catholico-Patriarch himself and robbed all Properties of his Church.

In these last years of the 13th century, when the course of the future was finally settled, Yahballaha could not foresee that he was yet to get through more than half of his long patriarchate. For this longer period, however, the Catholicos-Patriarch, whom even non-Christian Mongols had honoured in the past, was to be the head of a Church "under the cross", of a Church under persecution. The great majority of the Mongols (if not all of them) then embraced Islam, and against the background of the constant acts of violence by the Muslims it was only a small consolation for the Patriarch and his

24. *Histoire*, pp. 95 f.; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 206 f.

25. For the following (with much more details), cf. *Histoire*, pp. 97-131; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 208-239.

Church that the then Muslim Il-Khan on his part continued treating him with courtesy and even friendliness. Nevertheless, there were a few happy events in that dark half of Yahballaha's lifetime: he could complete the construction of a great monastery at Maragha, which was richly furnished, and he built another monastery in the metropolitan city of Arbela (Irbil), which, however, was destroyed by the Muslims soon afterwards.²⁶ In general, the Church in the Middle East since about 1300 had become the Church of a people who were repeatedly attacked and robbed; the Church of the East had become the Church of a Patriarch who often was a fugitive, not favoured by the rulers, as in the past. Nevertheless until his last day the Catholicos-Patriarch was secretly protected by some benevolent members of the Il-Khan's family. The last hard disappointment in Yahballaha's life came from Arghun's son Oljeitu, who had been baptized by Yahballaha and who as a young prince had often been the Patriarch's guest.²⁷ Oljeitu, too, became a convert to Islam, and as the Il-Khan (since 1304) he did not conceal his hatred towards his former Christian fellow believers. Of course, as was usual in the time of all his predecessors, Oljeitu also granted the Il-khan's certificate of appointment to the Catholicos-patriarch, the spiritual father of his childhood. But his former affection for him had departed, and one day he received him in such an icy manner that Yahballaha "made up his mind to visit the court of the Il-Khan never again".²⁸ Only his old friends in the Il-Khan's family received him once more with all honours at Tabriz in the year 1311²⁹. The Patriarch never met Oljeitu's son and successor Abu Said who became the Il-Khan in 1316, because during the last five years of his life Yahballaha had retired from the world and had withdrawn into his monastery at Maragha. The Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East died on 15 November 1317, and he was laid to rest in the monasery at Maragha.³⁰

26. *Histoire*, pp. 135-140. 150. 165 f; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 243-248. 257 f. 270.

27. *Histoire*, p. 148; Budge, *Monks*, p. 255.

28. *Histoire*, p. 202; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 303 f.

29. *Histoire*, p. 203; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 304 f.

30. *Histoire*, p. 204; Budge, *Monks*, pp. 305 f.

With all that he did in the Church and for his Church Yahballaha did not really measure up into a "great Patriarch". And he was not equal to those of his predecessors who had become famous in the history of Syrian theology and Syriac literature. In contrast to those scholars who had sat on the East Syrian patriarchal throne, the Mongol Patriarch from the Far East was only poorly acquainted with the Syriac language of his church, its liturgy and theology³¹. But Yahballaha gained importance as the person who in all the history of the Syrian Church of the East was the only representative of its easternmost people chosen to be its spiritual head. The period of Yahballaha's long pontificate stretching over the rule of no less than eight Il-Khans was of much importance in Eastern Church history. Yahballaha III headed his Church at its turning point from strength to decline. During his patriarchate he consecrated seventy-five metropolitans and bishops³², which number shows him up as the head of a large Church with a number of sees extending from Tarsus and Jerusalem in the West to South India and China in the East. But Yahballaha was the head of a Church, which suffered from the hatred of the Muslims in the then Islamic Il-Khanid state. About a hundred years after Yahballaha's death, and finally after the cruel campaign of Timur Lenk, the most important missionary Church of the Middle Ages had nearly disappeared. The Christian communities in the East beyond the Oxus had become isolated from the Mother Church, which was oppressed in Mesopotamia, and they disappeared —, as we have already seen, after the break down of the Mongol Empire. Only the Christians of St. Thomas in India were strong enough to survive in spite of their isolation from the Christian Middle East. As for the Church of the East in Mesopotamia itself, this Church, which in the past had been the spiritual centre of many peoples with diverse languages, this

31. Yahballaha himself was clearly aware of his limitations and therefore hesitant to become the Patriarch: "I am deficient in education and in ecclesiastical doctrine, and the member of my tongue halteth. How can I possibly become your Patriarch? And, moreover, I am wholly ignorant of your language, Syriac, which it is absolutely necessary for the Patriarch to know": *Histoire*, p. 34; Budge, *Monks*, p. 153.

32. *Histoire*, p. 204; Budge, *Monks*, p. 305.

really universal Church was obliged to withdraw into itself and to eke out a rather miserable existence in seclusion in the remote mountains of the North Mesopotamian Kurdistan. The Syrian Church of the East, after a long and great history in the Middle Ages, entered the modern period as the small Christian community of the "Assyrians", but "it still left behind it an imperishable memory that may well prove an incentive, in the matter of loyalty to Christ and devotion to His service, to the more highly favoured churches of to-day."³³

33. Stewart, *Missionary Enterprise* (cf. footnote 10 ch. 1), p. 329.

VII

Gregory Bar-Hebraya The Syrian Orthodox Scholar and Maphrian of the East¹

Syrian Orthodox ("Jacobite") Church History in the 13th century is dominated by a scholarly bishop who mostly is known by his Syriac nickname "Bar-Hebraya" ("son of the Hebrew")². His Christian name was John and his birthplace the city of Melitene (Malatya) west of the Upper Euphrates, where his father Aaron, a Christian of Jewish origin, was a famous and influential physician³.

The son of this "Hebrew" was born between October 1225 and September 1226 and his early days were part of a

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1. Annotated version of the author's biographical essay "Gregorius Barhebraeus", in: *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte* (cf. footnote 7, ch VI) IV, pp. 63-72.
 2. In Arabic he was nicknamed "Abu'l-Farag" (Father of what is pleasing) and "Ibn al-Hakim" (Son of the physician). - Regarding Syrian Orthodox ("Jacobite") Church History from about 1150 up to 1300, cf. P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance, Idee und Wirklichkeit* (Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten, vol. 3), 2nd ed., Berlin 1960.
 3. Bar-Hebraya's life is known from his own autobiography in the "Chronicon Ecclesiasticum" (continued by his brother, cf. footnote 29, ch VII below) and from some additional autobiographical remarks in his other writings, the oldest and best summary of which is given by J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. II, Roma 1721 (Reprint Hildesheim/New York 1975), pp. 244-267, being the basis of the biographical introduction of Budge, *Chronography* (cf. footnote 27, ch VII), I pp. XV-XXXI.

troubled era⁴. His home town was at first under the control of the Saljuqs of Rum, but it was situated in the border area close to the mighty Empire of the Egyptian Ayyubids and then Mamluks, the mortal enemies of the "Franks", as the Crusaders were called in the Near East. In the forties of the 13th century the Mamluks succeeded in conquering one Frankish base after another. Only the Principality of Antioch (the Frankish territory next to John's home) was able to resist until 1268. Two decades later the Country of Tripolis south of that Principality also fell, and after that there was finally left only the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, founded in close connection to the dominions of the Crusaders in 1198.

The first turning point in young John's life, however, was caused by the vanguard of the military power from Innermost Asia, appearing then as a quite new political element in the Middle and Near East⁵. In the year 1243 Mongol troops invaded the territories of the Saljuqs, reached the area of Melitene, and ended the peaceful period of this city, which John's father had utilized for his son's profound education. It was this early training to which John owed his basic knowledge about Bible exegesis and Church Fathers as well as about medicine. When this peaceful time then had come to its end, Aaron's family had the idea of leaving the troubled home, but their emigration was hindered for several reasons. When later the Mongols came again, their commander fell ill and he engaged the famous physician of Melitene. Only after that did Aaron and his family succeed in escaping from the Mongol territory and settling in the Frankish city of Antioch.

The choice of this city became significant for John's future life, because there was then the temporary residence of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius II who very soon took notice of the young John from Melitene and confirmed him in

4. Regarding political history of that time, cf. *A History of the Crusades*, ed. by the K. M. Setton a. o., vol. II, Philadelphia 1962, pp. 557-598 (Crusader States). 630-652 (Cilician Armenia). 675-684 (Saljuqs of Rum). 693-714 (Ayyubids). 715-732 (Mongols). 735-758 (Mamluks).

5. For Mongol advance to Melitene, cf. Fiey, *Chretiens* (cf. footnote 8, ch VI). pp. 7 f.

his intention of becoming a monk. In doing so however John did by no means intend to forsake the world for an ascetic life. He was not without the ambition to climb up to the higher ranks of the hierarchy, attainable for monks only. Therefore, John retired only for a year as hermit, dwelling in the surroundings of the metropolis, and then he continued his studies. Moving together with a fellow student to the Frankish city of Tripolis he joined, despite all theological difference, a Nestorian master to be trained by him in rhetoric and medicine; and in addition to this he rounded off his training with philosophical, astronomical and scientific studies.

On 14 September 1246 John, then only twenty years old, was consecrated bishop for the see of Gubos near his former home Melitene and was given, according to the custom of his Church, a new name, Gregory. The very next year he was transferred to the bishopric of Laqabin not far from Gubos⁶.

In 1252 the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius II passed away, and as often enough in the history of the West Syrian Church, rivalry hindered the investiture of a commonly accepted successor. So it was that two patriarchs were enthroned and the Church was broken in two. In this situation the young and ambitious bishop Gregory chose one side clearly demonstrating his talent for Church politics as well as his ability to change over at the right moment. Gregory himself had been a member of the small synod in the monastery of Barsauma, which had elected Dionysius, bishop of Melitene for Patriarch. And he was his energetic follower, acting against the other Patriarch, John XV elected a little later by a larger synod and with a bigger support in the Church. John XV was formerly "Maphrian", the head of the Syrian Orthodox minority in the eastern part of the Church in the formerly Persian territories, where the majority of Christians belonged to the (Nestorian) Church of the East⁷. To this Patriarch's disadvantage Gregory secured the ruler's certificate of appointment for his Patriarch Dionysius

6. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* (cf. footnote 28. ch VII) II, cols. 667-670. 685 f.

7. *Ibid.*, cols. 695-708. - For the maphrianate, cf. Kawerau, *Jakobitische Kirche*, pp. 23-34.

(by means of money, as it was usual in those days), and in return he was transferred to the more important bishopric of Aleppo in 1253⁸. But soon, when his Patriarch became more and more unpopular in the Church, Gregory changed his loyalties early enough not to be dragged into his Patriarch's downfall. By the time Dionysius finally was murdered as a tyrant in 1261⁹. Gregory had already attached himself to Patriarch John. This Patriarch, who passed away in 1263, had left the request that the bishop of Aleppo be made Maphrian, whose see had been vacant since 1258.

In order to elect a new Patriarch a synod was held in the following year in the Armenian territory of Cilicia, where bishop Gregory, too, was present. The new Patriarch was Ignatius III who with his bishops a few days later assembled in the Armenian capital Sis to elect the maphrian of the East and as expected, they chose the nearly forty-year-old Gregory. The consecration of the new "Maphrian of Taghrit and the East" was held in the church of St. Mary at Sis (in the presence of the Armenian King himself) on 19 January 1264.¹⁰

The small town of Taghrit, in the Maphrians' title, had not been their residence for a long time; they rather used to reside in the monastery of Mar Mattai in the mountains north of Mosul. Gregory, too, went there and once again he took a step over the borders. Far beyond the upper Euphrates was the realm of the Mongol Il-Khans, the rulers of Mesopotamia and Persia after their conquest of Baghdad and the murder of the last Muslim Caliph in 1258. The Il-Khanid state enclosing the Maphrian's diocese had favoured the Christians as we have already seen, from first half of the Catholicos-Patriarch Yabballaha's pontificate. There were still local troubles, when the Muslims attacked their Christian rivals as happened several times at Mosul in the neighbourhood of the Maphrian's residence. But in spite of those troubles Gregory maintained the official residence at Mar Mattai, although he was mostly obliged to travel

8. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* II, cols. 715 f. 721 f.

9. *Ibid.*, cols. 737 f.

10. *Ibid.*, cols. 749-752; III, cols. 431-434.—English translation by Budge, *Chronography* I, pp. XIX f.

all over the country in the performance of his duty¹¹. He had to reorganize his large diocese, which had fallen into disorder during the long years of vacancy in the turmoil of the Mongol conquest; he had to ordain bishops and to dedicate new buildings for the use of the Church. This duty again and again forced him to be absent from his monastery for long periods. He had not forgotten Taghrit, the ancient official residence, which had not seen its spiritual head for sixty years. The new maphrian took up his residence there for about two months. Repeatedly and for several months he stayed at Baghdad, too, the former magnificent capital of the Caliph, which in the Mongol conquest of 1258 had been damaged to a large extent; in this city Gregory consecrated a great new church for his Syrian Orthodox people.

The new maphrian very soon became popular, and on his journeys he was commonly welcomed by the crowds enthusiastically. Even in Baghdad, the centre of the dominating Syrian Church of the East, the welcome by the people was no less cordial. For not only his own Orthodox fellow believers but also the East Syrians received the Maphrian with great joy, and the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East himself honoured the Syrian Orthodox head. In the twenty years of his maphrianate Gregory was the contemporary of three East Syrian Catholicos-Patriarchs (Makkikha II, and Denha I, and Yahballaha III) and was associated with them generally in a friendly (or to use the modern expression) "ecumenical" way, without ignoring the dogmatical differences, which were distinct enough in the Maphrian's mind, as he demonstrated in a long dogmatical letter addressed to the Catholicos-Patriarch Denha I¹².

We might sum up the situation: The eastern part of the Syrian Orthodox Church, after many years of disorder, was given again a spiritual leader who was distinguished by his sense of duty, who strengthened his Church in the East and who gave his Syrian Orthodox people a new authority in their relationship

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11. A detailed report of the Maphrian's activities (only outlined in the following) is given in the autobiography, cf. footnote 29 ch VII below.
12. J. B. Chabot, *Une lettre de Bar Hebreus au Catholicos Denha Ier*, in: *Journal Asiatique*, ser. 9, vol. II (Paris, 1398), pp. 75-128.

with the (Nestorian) Church of the East and with the Mongol rulers.

While fulfilling his obligations in his own diocese, the Maphrian continued to deal with the affairs of the greater Church under the Patriarch as its common head. The reason for Gregory's first return to the West was his own desire to see his homeland again. Four years after he had become the Maphrian, he went west as far as Sis of Cillicia, where he fell critically ill. But this first journey to the West was unfortunate not primarily because of Gregory's own illness, but because of troubles in the Church. Gregory was involved in a dispute of the Patriarch concerning the affairs of his residency monastery Barsauma. And in order to settle this quarrel the Maphrian was compelled to go to the West for a second time five years later in 1273¹³. For a third time Gregory was invited to come to the West at the end of the year 1282, when he was summoned to his Patriarch's sick-bed as a physician. This call was an appreciation of his abilities beyond his ecclesiastical responsibilities. But the winter as well as political disturbances in the West hindered the physician's journey and the consequences of his staying away were disagreeable. The invitation had been an honourable recognition of Gregory's medical ability, but eventually he was hurt in his rights as the Maphrian. After the Patriarch had passed away a hastily summoned synod elected a new head in spite of the Maphrian's absence. This was a clear offence against the Church law, justified by the assembled bishops by the plea of lack of time. Gregory however on his part was right in taking it as an act of hostility. Perhaps the western bishop feared that he aspired to be elected patriarch himself. For quite a while the Maphrian did not officially agree to the decision in the West, but finally he complied with it in order to avoid the impression that he was disappointed in not being raised to the higher rank. On the contrary, he made it known that desolate conditions of the Church in the western territories of the patriarchate held no attraction for a man of

13. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* III cols. 439-446; Budge, *Chronography* I, pp. XXII f.

nearly sixty years of age who had to put in a great effort in organizing the affairs of his own diocese¹⁴.

That Gregory, indeed, was not interested in the leadership of the Syrian Orthodox Church, but was satisfied with his second rank in hierarchy, must be clear to everyone who is acquainted with Gregory's own wider interests. The real passion of this Maphrian was not to be a restless acting bishop-in-chief, but to find the leisure to write books in the peace and quiet of his cell amidst his books. And this was what he could find in the country of Azerbaijan, where the Mongol rulers as well as the East Syrian Catholicos-Patriarch had their residences. There Gregory retired, whenever he was able to, dwelling in his monastery in the city of Maragha. Here he continued the work, which he had started from his early youth, and here he could complete it. In the quiet monastery of Maragha the name of "Bar-Hebraya" gained the prominence that we know of in the history of Syriac literature, and the literary importance of the scholar Bar-Hebraya, outshone his merits as a Maphrain.

In the age of Bar-Hebraya Syriac Christianity once again took up centuries-old heritage and systematised it, shortly before the decline of the West and East Syrian Churches by the end of the Middle Ages. And in this period of the so-called "Syriac Renaissance" Bar-Hebraya represented his Syrian Orthodox Church in the first place, distinguishing himself less by literary originality, that by the encyclopaedic dimension of his work¹⁵. Bar-Hebraya summarized his own Christian Syrian tradition drawing upon all the heritage of the ancient Greeks and connecting it with the Arab Muslim scholarship,

14. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* II, II, cols. 777 f.; III, cols. 455-460; Budge, *Chronography* I, pp. XXVI f.

15. A list of his writings is given in *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* III, cols. 475-482; Budge, *Chronography* I, pp. XXXII-XXXV. - For manuscripts, editions, and translations, cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literature*, Bonn 1922 (Reprint Berlin 1968), pp. 312-320, and (for published literature only) I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 2nd ed., Roma 1965, pp. 221-223; W. Hage, *Gregor Barhebraeus*, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopaedie*, vol. XIV, Berlin / New York 1985, pp. 158-164 (especially pp. 162 f.: "Quellen"). - The following list only mentions Bar-Hebraya's main writings.

which likewise had taken in ancient Greek traditions. Having learnt about all those traditions Bar-Hebraya mastered the entire gamut of knowledge of his days. All the theological, philosophical, philological, scientific and medical topics of his time were treated by him in more than thirty books, written mostly in traditional Syriac, but partly also in Arabic, which had become the vernacular of the Christian Syrian people, too. And according to the Arabic style he decorated all his work with ornate headings.

Gregory Bar-Hebraya devoted a "Book of the Cream of the Wisdom"¹⁶, a "Book of the pupils of the Eye"¹⁷ and some other writings to the Greek philosopher Aristoteles, whose philosophical system was presented to this extent for the first time in the Syriac language. In doing this Bar-Hebraya had not studied the Greek philosopher's original works, but had become acquainted with them in that tradition, which had included the influence of Neo-Platonism. His Aristoteles was the Aristoteles of the Arab philosopher Avicenna (d. 1033), and he depended on Avicenna to such an extent that he just followed his arrangement of the material. In all his philosophical works Bar-Hebraya did not present a well-rounded philosophical system of his own, but by his publications, including some translations of Arabic philosophical texts, he created the Syriac terminology, which was indispensable in order to participate in the Arab science of his days. There was a Syrian-Arab interdependence in so far as Syrian Christians had been the masters of the Arabs in earlier days, and Syrian Christians had formed the Arabic philosophical terms¹⁸. But in the meantime

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16. Ktobo d-hewat hekmtō (partial editions): *Analecta orientalia ad poeticam Aristotelicam*, ed. by D. S. Margoliouth, London 1887, pp. 114-139; *Die Physiognomik des Barhebraeus in syrischer Sprache*, ed. and transl. by G. Furlani, in: *Zeitschrift fuer Semitistik*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 1-16.
 17. Ktobo d-boboto: *Bar Hebraeus' Book of the Pupils of the Eye*, ed. and (partly) transl. by H. F. Janssens, in: *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, vol. 47 (Chicago, 1930-31), pp. 26-49. 94-134; 48 (1931-32), pp. 209-263; 52 (1935-36), pp. 1-21.
 18. N. Rescher, *The Development of Arabic Logic*, Pittsburgh 1964, pp. 15-32.

things had changed and since the end of the first millenium the Muslim Arabs had surpassed their Syrian masters in the fields of philosophy and of philology. So Bar-Hebraya, like other Syrians in the past, wrote about the grammar of his Syriac language. But his "Book of the Rays"¹⁹, dealing with this topic, in its conception totally followed an Arabic prototype.

The first extensive theological work of Bar-Hebraya was the "Book of the Candelabra of the Sanctuary"²⁰, which he probably wrote around that time when he moved from the bishopric of Aleppo to the maphrianate. It is really a "Summa Theologica", presenting the entire system of teaching of the Syrian Orthodox Church in a wide scientific context, composed in a scholastic manner, for even here Aristoteles was in the background. This work is divided into twelve chapters ("seṭēsē",) "foundations", dealing with all the dogmatic topics such as "Human knowledge in General", "Nature of the Universe," "Doctrine of God", "Incarnation", "Angels", "Priesthood and Sacraments", "Demons", "Rational Soul", "Free Will and

19. Ktobo d-semhe: Le Livre des splendeurs, la grande grammaire de Gregoire Barhebraeus, ed. by A. Moberg (Skrifter utgivna av humanistiska vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, vol. 4), Lund 1922; Buch der Strahlen, die groessere Grammtik des Barhebraeus, transl. by A. Moberg, vol. I-II, Leipzig 1907-13.

20. Ktobo da-mnorat qudse: Le candelabre des sanctuaires de Gregoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus, ed. and transl. by J. Bakos a. o., in: Patrologia Orientalis, vol. XX, Paris 1930, pp. 489-628; XXIV (1933), pp. 295-439; XXVII (1957), pp. 451-626; XXXI (1964), pp. I-267; XIII (1916), pp. 252-269; XXX (1961-63), pp. 603-720, 271-340; XLIII (1985) pp. 163-317; XXXV (1969), pp. 217-280; XLI (1983); XL (1981), pp. 363-518. - Jacobitische Sakramententheologie im 13. Jh., der Liturgie-kommentar des Gregorius Barhebraeus, ed and transl. by R. Kohlhaas (Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen, vol. 36), Muenster 1959; Psychologie de Gregoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus d' apres la huitieme base de l' ouvrage Le candelabre des sanctuaires, ed. and transl. by J. Bakos, Leiden 1948; Die Einleitung zur Psychologie des Barhebraeus im achten Fundamente seines Buches der "Leuchte des Heiligtums", ed. and transl. by J. Bakos, in: Archiv orientali, vol. 10 (Praha, 1938), pp. 121-127. - P. Kawerau, Bar Hebraeus, die mono-physische Summa theologica, in: Das Christentum des Ostens (Die Religionen der Menschheit, vol. 30), Stuttgart 1972, pp. 63-82.

Fate", "Resurrection of the Dead", "Last Judgement", and "Paradise". Into this wide theological spectrum Bar-Hebraya integrated all the natural sciences of the ancient Greeks (already accepted by earlier Syrian theologians) and the science of the Arabs, especially of their geographers and by doing so Bar-Hebraya enlarged his "Summa Theologica" to a compendium of the knowledge of his days in the amplest sense.

The second large theological work of Bar-Hebraya, the "Storehouse of the Mysteries"²¹, also was an encyclopaedic one, written, as we definitely know, within a few months between December 1277 and August 1278. In this work, again he displayed the rich store of his knowledge of natural sciences of astronomy, geography and medicine, but this time within the framework of a largely structured commentary of the Old and New Testament. By doing so he dedicated his knowledge for the purpose of practical Bible exegesis to give his priests a handbook not only containing textual criticism, biblical exegesis, lexicography and chronology, but also at the same time compensating for all other books urgently needed for Biblical interpretation.

After this large handbook Bar-Hebraya wrote a "Book of Ethics" ("Ethicon")²², conceived according to the ascetic-mystical tradition of the Christian orient as well as under the influence of the Islamic mystical ideas of alGhazzali (d. 1111). The "Ethicon" was intended to be given to the broad mass of the believers; and a digest of it with appropriate changes, entitled

21. Ausar roze (partial editions): J. Zolinski, *Zur Chronographie des Gregorius Abulpharagius*, Breslau 1894; Barhebraeus' *Scholia on the Old Testament I Genesis-II Samuel*, ed. and transl. by M. Sprengling and W. Creighton (Oriental Institute publications, vol. 13), Chicago 1931; Gregory Abul's *Faraj* commonly called Bar-Hebraeus, *Commentary on the Gospels from the Horreum Mysteriorum*, ed. and transl. by W. E. W. Carr, London 1925.

22. *Ktobō d-itiqōn: Ethicon seu moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, ed. by p. Bedjan, Paris / Leipzig 1898; cf. the following footnote.

“Book of the Dove”²³, was especially dedicated to the monks. The general purpose of these ethical books was the improvement of the morality of the people, but Bar-Hebraya was also interested in stressing the importance of the law in the daily life of his Church. With a view to this he collected the various decisions of the ancient synods of the Syrian Orthodox Church as well as the regulations of secular law concerning the Church. This collection, called the “Book of the Guidances” (“Nomocanon”)²⁴, has been the basic legal code of the Syrian Orthodox Church since then.

The work however, that was to have an influence far beyond his own Church was Bar-Hebraya’s “Chronicon”, which he had started in 1275 and continued until the last days of his life. The outcome of this work of over ten years was an encyclopaedia of all the chronological and historical data of Bar-Hebraya’s time. Under the short but comprehensive title, “Description of the Ages”²⁵, this “Chronicon” includes a complete history of the world in general and of Church History in particular. In compiling this the Maphrian could take most of his material from the Chronicle of World and Church History up to 1196 by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Michael the Great (d. 1199) who on his part had used the older historical liter-

23. Ktobo d- yauno: Liber columbae seu directorium monachorum Gregorii Barhebraei, *ibid.*, pp. 519-599; Abulfaragii Gregorii Bar-Hebraei Mafriani Orientis Kithabha dhiyauna seu Liber columbae, ed. by G. Cardahi, Roma 1898; Bar Hebraeus’ Book of the Dove together with some Chapters from his Ethicon, transl. by A. J. Wensinck, Leiden 1919.

24. Ktobo d- huddoye: Nomocanon Gregori Barhebraei, ed. by P. Bedjan, Paris 1898; Ecclesiae Antiochenae Syrorum Nomocanon a Gregorio Abulpharagio Bar-Hebraeo Syriace compositus, transl. by J. A. Assemanus, in: *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e Vaticanis condicibus*, vol. X, 2, Roma 1838, pp. 1-268.

25. Maktbonut zabne. Cf. footnotes 27 and 28 below.

ature of his Church.²⁶ Bar-Hebraya, however, completely altered the tabular data form of Michael's Chronicle and transformed it into a continuous narrative, expanding it with historical material of the East Syrian tradition and adding to it all the Syriac, Arabic and Persian documents, which he had collected in his library at Maragha. This large work which rounded off the historical literature of the Orthodox Syrians, consists of three parts and clearly show the Syrian Orthodox Church as it saw itself with its two components, the patriarchate in the West and the maphrianate in the East. The first part of the "Chronicon" deals with profane history from the Creation up to the rule of the Mongol Il-Khans.²⁷ The second part ("Chronicon Ecclesiasticum" dealing with Church History) starts with the High Priests in the Old Testament, goes on to deal with St. Peter, the head of the Apostles and first bishop of Antioch, and then with the line of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs up to Bar-Hebraya's contemporaries. The third part is devoted to the history of his own eastern diocese. It is the "Liber Pontificalis" of the Christian East in its entirety and beginning with the missionary work of the Apostle Thomas it contains the history of the Catholicoi- Patriarchs of the East Syrian Church as well as of the Syrian Orthodox Maphrians of the East up to the time of the author himself.²⁸ Thus Bar-Hebraya's chronographical work, the "Description of the Ages", ends with his autobiography up to almost the last days of his life. Other

26. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d' Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. and transl. by J. B. Chabot, vols. I-IV, Paris 1899-1910 (Reprint Bruxelles) 1963.

27. *Gregori Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. by P. Bedjan, Paris 1890. *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj commonly known as Bar Hebraeus being the First Part of his Political History of the World*, ed. and transl. by E. A. W. Budge, vols. I-II, London 1932.

28. *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed and transl. by J. B.: Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, vols. I-III, Louvain 1872-77.

writers continued his work after him for some decades.²⁹ Bar-Hebraya knew that this "Chronicon" was considered a standard work not just by the members of his own church. He was persuaded by the Muslim people of Maragha to write its first part (secular history) again, in the Arabic language and slightly adapted for its Muslim readers. It was published under the new title: "Summarized History of the Dynasties".³⁰

This was the last work, to complete which Bar-Hebraya, as he foresaw, had only a few weeks left. The Maphrian, who had a wide range of interests, by means of astrological calculations had predicted that he would pass away in the year 1286, which had just begun.³¹ He had neither physical suffering nor loss of strength to make plausible this supposition, but it came true. The tireless worker Maphrian Gregory Bar-Hebraya expired at Maragha in the night of 29 July 1286, after an illness of less than three days. A long cortege of believers of all the Christian denominations escorted the body of the famous Syrian Orthodox Maphrian to be buried in his church at Maragha. His mortal remains were transferred later on to the traditional burial plot of the Maphrians in the monastery of Mar Mattai, where the tomb of Gregory Bar-Hebraya is seen until the present day.³²

The achievements, of Gregory Bar-Hebraya as the Maphrian were to fade out soon because the Syrian Orthodox

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29. Autobiography and completion of his biography by his own brother *ibid.* III, cols 431-486 Budge *Chronography* I, pp. XX-XXXI.
30. *Tarih muhtasar ad-duwal li' l-allama Griguriyus al-Malati al-maruf b' Ibn al 'Ibri*, ed. by A. Salhani, Bairut 1890 (Reprint 1958).
31. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* III, cols. 465-468; Budge, *Chronography* I, p. XXVIII.
32. *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* III cols. 467-476. 493f.; Budge *Chronography* I pp. XXIX f. - For the Maphrian's tomb in Mar Mattai, cf. *Ibid.* p. LXI (ground plan of the church of the monastery) and plate V (epitaph).

Christians as well as the believers of the Syrian Church of the East suffered when the public opinion in the Mongol realm became hostile to the Christian people and their Churches were decimated under the persecutions, as we have already noted.

In spite of the decline of the Church the literary work of Bar-Hebraya survived because there was no one to equal him in the generations to come after him. Gregory Bar-Hebraya who had summarized the entire Syrian heritage was and still is the authority in the Syrian Orthodox Church in all areas of its life. Soon after his death his work was partly translated into Arabic³³, the vernacular then of the Christian people, too, and it has constituted the basic stock of the theological libraries of the Syrian Orthodox all through the centuries. It was this famous Bar-Hebraya who through his great literary output introduced the scholars in the Occident in modern times into the wide and fascinating field of Syriac studies and of the study of Syrian Church History.



33. G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literature*, vol II (Studi e testi, vol. 133), Citta del Vaticano 1947 (Reprint 1964), pp. 272-281.

